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CHEQUEBOOK JOURNALISM: A SOUTH AFRICAN PICTURE

Susan Lisabeth Stos

A research report submitted to the Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Journalism

Johannesburg, 2009

ABSTRACT

Chequebook Journalism in Television Actuality – a South African Picture

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November 2008

Chequebook journalism is the convention of paying for stories. It is considered antithetical to good journalism, yet is essentially ignored in many codes of conduct. This research report investigates television actuality programs *Carte Blanche, Special Assignment* and *Third Degree* in which the theory, as well as the practice of chequebook journalism was discussed with the journalists and executive producers. Discussion expanded into other contingent, morally suspect areas of payment, and the lines they felt should not be transgressed. Four focus groups of viewers then debated chequebook journalism and the quality of these programs. It was anticipated that the practice of journalism would be in line with audience views yet the standard of journalism as herein established surpassed viewer estimation. Whereas the topic has been written of extensively in many first world English-speaking countries, no research has been conducted in South Africa, thus adding valuable information to the study of journalism.

Key words: chequebook journalism, paying for stories, buying stories, ethics, television journalism

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Journalism in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

_____

Susan Lisabeth Stos

_____ day of _____, 2009.

To my husband Neville Toerien,

and my daughters Lara and Dana,

with gratitude and love

for their encouragement, support

and understanding

during the writing of this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge assistance from the following people:

The more than two dozen journalists

who generously provided their time and valuable information

both on and off the record;

Oscar Lockwood, Mike Gibbsons and the staff at Lifestyle Nurseries

for their help in assembling focus groups

and for providing the venue;

26 focus group members

who were interested enough to want to take part;

and the many people who kindly gave their

time to provide essential background information.

This research report would not have been possible

without the indispensable guidance from my supervisor,

Franz Kruger

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Chequebook journalism, or paying for stories, is an issue that has long prompted passionate debate, specifically in the Western world. So rampant has the practice become in television journalism in America that iconic journalist Walter Cronkite caustically suggested that broadcasters be required to note, on screen, how much they had paid for the story. (Prato, 1994) In the United Kingdom it is the press that has been tarred with this brush, at times even being censured by the law. (Higham, 2003)

The debate has recently been discussed by the South African media and public, probably for the first time ever, in the wake of the ongoing speculation about how *The Sunday Times* sourced former Health Minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang's health files, and whether they had been paid for. *The Sunday Times,* through its lawyer, has simply stated that "it did not pay one cent for access to the records and regards the practice of paying for information and stories as unethical." ("Sanef outraged by action against editor." 2007)

Why is paying for stories an issue? Why would *The Sunday Times* regard this practice as unethical? If one follows the debates in America and the UK, it is clear that this is the thin end of the wedge, and discourse is critical, not only amongst journalists but with the public as well. Journalism as a profession is threatened by such customs, yet codes of conduct are disappointingly vague. Chequebook journalism and the contiguous issues of exchanging money for stories will be investigated in this paper, providing insight into an area of South African journalism that has not been explored.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this research report is to examine the issue of paying sources for stories. It will also investigate adjacent monetary matters such as paying consultants, paying for videotape, paying expenses, etc. to determine whether they have the potential to affect the credibility and standards of journalism. Three South African television actuality programs have been chosen to determine in what way and how frequently it happens. This research will ascertain whether there is a market; how often and if it is applied; when journalists themselves feel an ethical line is crossed. It will also investigate whether the audiences are told; indeed, how acceptable the practice is with audiences.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the ethical considerations amongst the producers in three South African television current affairs programs with regard to paying for stories, and the morally ambiguous issues surrounding chequebook journalism?

2. In what circumstances have such practices been employed and what has been the rationale for doing so?

3. What are the thoughts of the practitioners regarding applied ethical standards and the thinking about them? When do they feel an ethical line has been transgressed, and what is the foundation of their viewpoints?

4. Are these notions in line with audience views?

1.4 Rationale

Chequebook journalism is a subject that has been pontificated and pondered upon in academic journals in many first world countries, yet apart from the 'Manto health files' the issue has not surfaced in the South African media or academic journals apart from one article in 1993. (Roelofse)

The subject raises issues of credibility, which is critical to the practice of journalism. A source who is paid is no longer objective. (S)he becomes financially invested in the story, and is, for all intents and purposes, an employee of the journalist. For that reason, the information forthcoming may be exaggerated, distorted, or even fabricated. The source may withhold essential information, hoping for a second instalment.

Information that is in the public interest is deemed worthy of departure from the highest standards of journalism, and in America discussion of the President's sex life is considered to be in the public interest. That is not the case in South Africa, where paying for information of this nature would be regarded as the nadir of journalism.

By investigating circumstances surrounding various aspects of paying for stories at three South African actuality programs on three different television stations, this research report will delineate the practice. It will also provide valuable information on a subject that has been academically overlooked in the country while presenting insight into the perception of viewers.

The issue of whether journalistic norms are in line with audience perceptions has also not been studied in South Africa, and is perhaps the most pertinent aspect of the exploration. The norms, as revealed by more than twenty interviews with journalists, may be exactly in line with audience expectation. In that case journalists would be fulfilling their mandate to the public. Should there be disparities in journalistic norms and audience views, it is of significant concern.

The three actuality programs chosen for this research paper are *Carte Blanche*, *Special Assignment* and *3rd Degree*. They were selected specifically because they are the flagship current affairs programs for M-Net, SABC and e-tv respectively. All three are investigative programs and as such push the boundaries in their quest to uncover corruption and crime, break new ground and serve the public interest.

They are under constant pressure to deliver newsworthy stories on a weekly basis. They would be approached more frequently than other programs by members of the public with stories for sale, and would have had to decipher the ethics of making such decisions.

1.4.1 ***Carte Blanche***, on M-Net, is the longest running program of the three, this being their twenty-first year on air. Created by Bill Faure in 1988, it was designed to incorporate both light programming with investigative journalism, as well as profiles and interviews. Viewing is by subscription only and as such, the audience ratings cannot compare to programs that are on free to air/public channels. The audience profile is more affluent than the average viewer on the other two channels. (L. Lombard, personal communication, 2008)

14.2 ***Special Assignment*** on SABC is a specifically investigative current affairs program. It has been on air for a decade and was launched by journalists Jacques Pauw and Max du Preez. Its audience ratings are substantially higher than both *3rd Degree* and *Carte Blanche*. (Pauw, 2006)

1.4.3 ***3rd Degree*** on e-tv is a free to air channel. The channel itself was only launched a decade ago, and *3rd Degree* was on air virtually from the start. Its mandate is to investigate, challenge and expose, and to hold those in authority accountable. Of the three programs, *3rd Degree* has the smallest budget, and is very popular amongst the lower living standards measure (LSM) groups. (H. Lategan, personal communication, 2008)

The analysis of journalistic ethics in the above three programs will significantly add to the body of knowledge in the field of South African journalism.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 A Short Discussion of Ethics

Ethics is a branch of philosophy focusing on what is morally acceptable and what is not. Two distinct branches of ethical philosophy have evolved: Meta-ethics, or descriptive ethics; and normative, or applied ethics.

The classical theories of meta-ethics concentrate on teleology and deontology. The former is the study of ends, goals and purpose, in which "the ends of things are seen as providing the meaning for all that has happened or that occurs." In short, teleology focuses on the outcome. "World Civilizations" (Hooker, 1996)

Deontology is concerned with duty, obligation and "calls for certain things to be done because of their inherent rightness" as opposed to the effect of the actions. (Kruger, 2004:3) Therefore deontology concerns itself more with input. "You raise and then respond to questions based on obligation: What should a good person do to behave well? What basic duties or responsibilities ought I obey or pursue, notwithstanding the consequences?" (Steele, 1992)

Normative ethics are based on these classical theories, but associated with what people and institutions ought to do; (Oosthuizen, 2002:14) hence the moral framework upon which people and institutions can gauge their actions has two pegs: Whether the end is justified by the means used; and whether they have fulfilled their obligations by telling the truth.

Ethics and laws differ in that the former aspires to the highest standards of behaviour, while the law is concerned only with adherence to minimum standards.

2.2 Journalism Ethics

Any discussion about journalism must include consideration of ethics. Whether its practitioners are conscious of it or not, every single choice a journalist makes has an ethical base, including

> "who to interview and who not to interview; who to quote and who not to quote; what angles to emphasise and which to play down; what to include and what to leave out; how much to reveal to an interviewee regarding the real purpose of an interview; and so on … Logically, then, whether they realise it or not, journalists do not have any choice between considering ethics or excluding it from their practice (sic)." (Richards, 2002)

Journalism ethics are derived from normative ethics. However, upon considering various journalistic issues, from responsible reporting to treatment of sources, conflicts of interest and the use of deception amongst others, even experienced journalists can find themselves in a dilemma as the principles are often incompatible with each other. Many ethical quandaries, in fact, fall into grey areas that have no definitive answer. In reconsidering the two branches of classical ethics, teleology and deontology, moral predicaments become easier to assess. It is the foundation upon which all actions can be judged. "We would do better to think of ethics as more proactive, a thought process that helps us do the right thing." (Steele, 1992)

If one's normative approach is teleological deception, which is not condoned in ethical codes, could be defended if a serial killer was ultimately put behind bars. It does, however, risk hypocrisy. (Kieran, 1997:2) "Paradoxically, we demand that journalists tell the truth, and yet, to get at the truth, they may have to lie." (Kieran, 1997:66) The intent of the deceit is all important; if deceit is used and happens later to be justified, it is not ethically sound. One must always justify the deceit from the outset. (Kieran, 1997:72) "Where there are no other means of investigating a matter that a journalist has good grounds to believe is one of great public interest, then such typically dubious means are justifiable." (Kieran, 1997:73)

On the other hand, practitioners of deontology, concerned more with the rightness and wrongness of the actions themselves, would approach the same story using a completely different method as their modus operandi would not include deception. However, a deontological approach may be problematic if a journalist uncovers state secrets that would jeopardise the nation should they be made public, or any instance when full disclosure may harm individuals.

Kieran also raises another point with regard to journalistic ethics. What may appear unethical to the public may be very ethical in journalistic practice. He uses the example of journalists calling on parents of a recently deceased child to request a photograph. (Kieran, 1997:10) "Moral innocents" as he refers to a public "unfamiliar with the more pragmatic ways of the world," (Kieran, 1997:6) would likewise be horrified to know of the number of obituaries that publishers and broadcasters have on their shelves. Upon hearing of the death of a household name, it is instinct to search through the newspapers for confirmation, or hunt for more details on television. There is a need to mourn collectively. No one extrapolates to consider the work that needs to have been done beforehand, "for journalism, or good journalism at least, perhaps requires certain clinical detachment from and disregard for some of the ethical niceties and sensitivities of everyday ethical life." (Kieran, 1997:3)

But it is not often, other than at academic institutions, that journalists are given the opportunity to mull over such philosophical ideas. Ethics are often explored as they present themselves in the work environment and "tend towards the pragmatic… typically framed in response to particular press scandals, worries raised by certain pressure groups, or perceived government interference," (Kieran, 1997:3) or even "observed mainly in the breach". (Nel 2007: 333)

Whether ethics in journalism are explored or not,

> "a system of ethics is a cornerstone of any civilisation. It is essential for building trust and cooperation among individuals in society, and serving as a moral gatekeeper in apprising society of the relative importance of certain moral values, acting as a moral arbitrator in resolving conflicting claims based on individuals self-interests, and clarifying for society the competing values and principles inherent in emerging and novel moral dilemmas." (Day, 2002:49)

2.3 Journalism as a Profession

Indeed, while ethics in journalism may be consciously considered only when situations present themselves, ethics in occupations such as medicine and law are strictly enforced. Doctors adhere to the Hippocratic Oath, while lawyers comply with the rules as set out by the relevant law societies. The bases of these codes have been in existence since ancient times. (Oath and Law of Hippocrates; Golash, 1999)

However, the function of a journalist has changed significantly over the ages. For example, where the Second World War required advocacy, even propaganda at times, (Williams, 2003:30) subsequent journalists perceived their role differently. They increasingly began to regard objectivity as paramount, and pursued the notion of professionalism. (Kruger, 2004:76)

To be a professional is to be bound and regulated by enforceable codes of ethical conduct. Members of a specific occupational group must also:

- "Share a common body of knowledge - similar qualifications and same level of expertise;
- Follow the same occupational path – for example, study, attain a qualification, go through an internship, and register;
- Attain societal recognition as members of a profession." (Oosthuizen, 2002:57-58)

These features of professionalism are observed in medicine and law, which are universally accepted as professions. There is a body of knowledge that is studied

and absorbed by students hoping for entry into the industries, taught by those who have attained such standards. The graduates of these programs are the only individuals allowed to provide the services. They are also self-regulating, with many of the practitioners in private practice. Indeed, "self-regulation is an important prerequisite for the recognition of the professional status of an occupation." (Oosthuizen, 2002:138)

There is significant debate as to whether journalism is a profession. While a specific relationship exists between a doctor and patient, a lawyer and a client, the relationship between a journalist and 'the public' is undefined. (Carey, 1987:46 as cited in Richards, 2002) Certainly its practitioners do not have similar qualifications and expertise, or even share a common body of knowledge or occupational path. It is also most definitely not a closed occupation. Journalistic education is a fairly recent development, and journalists traditionally have been self taught, their training completed on the job. (Dasselaar, 2007) Even today, anyone with the wherewithal to write or tell a good story can function in the world of journalism.

While the parameters of professionalism would not seem to include journalism, Allison (1986:15) suggests that additional criteria are required, such as whether or not the occupation is essential to society and "instrumental in guaranteeing life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness". (as cited in Richards, 2002)

The very essence of journalism is also described by Belsey & Chadwick (1992:xi) "in terms of a set of concepts which are essentially ethical, terms like freedom, objectivity, truth, honesty, privacy". (as cited in Richards, 2002)

2.4 Journalistic Codes of Ethics

Whether or not journalism can be deemed a profession, it is certainly a self-governing occupation that requires ethical codes to set standards for behaviour. Such codes are:

> "(S)upposed to act as the conscience of the professional, of the organisation, of the enterprise...The strength of an ethics code is a function not only of its various principles and mandates, but of its legitimacy and power in the eyes of those for whom it is written. The code will be obeyed because individuals willingly subject themselves to ethical standards above and beyond their own personal beliefs or because the code has specific provisions for enforcement which they fear should they violate it."(Black, Steele, Barney, 1995:13-14)

Singer (1990:18) has also stated that professional ethics should focus on "the making of moral judgements on ethical issues related to the profession, according to professional standards". (as cited in Richards, 2002) To ensure the success of a code, there must be a certain amount of 'buy in' from the group for whom it was conceived. It must have legitimacy and power in the eyes of its practitioners. (Black et al., 1995:13) Professional bodies who act as watchdogs for their respective industries have the authority to withdraw the right to practice in some industries, for example, a doctor may be sued for malpractice and struck off the role, but a journalist fired from one media organisation can simply elect to work for another as journalistic codes of ethics, "one of the prerequisites of a profession", (Black et al., 1995:13) are not enforceable.

There is no definitive universal code of ethics in journalism either, as the medical profession has in the Hippocratic Oath, and countries - even media organisations - vary in their governing ideologies.

Beyond the toothlessness and array of codes, there is an entire debate about whether or not a code of ethics for journalism is even desirable. McNair noted that

while a journalistic code would legitimate the profession, (1998:65) critics assert that such codes are nothing more than a statement of ideals, to be conveniently ignored in the pursuit of the profession. (Day, 2003:45). "In fact, the lack of an enforceable ethical code is cited by some as evidence of the media's lack of professional standing." (Day, 2003:46)

Opponents perceive ethical codes as a form of censorship, "a retreat from the independence and autonomy necessary for a free and robust mass communication enterprise," (Day, 2003:45) and, of necessity, vague and general. And while codes of ethics do have some public relations value, they can't begin to cover every eventuality, and as a result "many journalists erroneously conclude that there are no useful guidelines, that each ethical decision is made *ad hoc* or independently of all other decisions". (Black et al., 1995:14)

There have been debates about licensing journalists to ensure mandatory codes of conduct. Supporters maintain that standards of journalism would rise, but opponents argue that it is an infringement of free speech, and that anyone, licensed or not, should be able to offer an opinion. It was also felt that it would give governments too much power – the power to revoke licenses if they were unhappy with the content. (Nel, 2007:338) Richards (2002:3) has proposed that the reason there have not been the necessary discussions of ethics in journalism worldwide is that it might prove to be the "thin end of the wedge with regard to regulation". There is also a suspicion that with a formal code spelled out, journalists may find it used against them in a court of law.

While there is some validity to the various criticisms of having a code, even with the codes themselves, they are necessary. Without any code individuals are left to make moral judgements on their own. As journalism does not require any formal training or a shared body of knowledge, as there is no registration or recognition

that they are the only individuals capable of undertaking the function, it is especially important that there is a written code and a set of ethics to guide the industry.

Nel (2007:340) points out that, "media codes are only guidelines, not clear answers – journalists still need to develop skills in order to implement them in practical situations". But whether or not its practitioners observe codes of ethics, there are societal expectations of journalists to tell the truth in a fair, accurate and balanced way.

> "Journalists can consider ethics as applied in practice – or they can avoid the issue. If they do the former, they are at the very least demonstrating the responsibility many claim to be implicit in the notion of professionalism. Alternatively, if they adopt the latter approach, their practice becomes a matter of personal responsibility and liability as they position their own judgment as final arbiter." (Richards, 2002)

2.5 Normative Theories of the Media

According to the idea of professionalism, therefore, audiences should be of prime concern to journalists. (Richards, 2002) Descriptions of how the media were expected to function in society, or normative theories of the media, were devised by Schramm, Siebert and Peterson in the 1950's. Two more theories were subsequently added by McQuail.

These theories are important because they outline some general principles that can be used to classify the expectations of the media in certain national circumstances. Each of the main theories is associated with a specific system of government. Because the press have vital functions to fulfil in a democratic society, such as being a watchdog of the government, supporting democracy, communicating information and creating a forum for various points of view, it is presumed that they should meet certain standards. (McQuail, 1987:109)

These normative theories include authoritarian, free press, social responsibility and the Soviet model, to which McQuail added the developing media and democratic-participant theories. The free press theory ultimately gave way to social responsibility after a growing awareness that in some essential respects, the free market had failed to fulfil the promise of press freedom. (McQuail as cited in Normative Theories of the Media, 2006.) It is the social responsibility theory of the media that is most relevant to democratic countries.

2.5.1 The Social Responsibility Theory

It would also appear to be the most accurate theory to describe the media in South Africa under the current government. The features of the social responsibility theory include fulfilling duties for society by providing information that is truthful, accurate, with an emphasis on neutrality and objectivity. It should be self-regulating, avoid publishing information that can offend or lead to violence, and should reflect a diverse society with diverse viewpoints while holding itself independent. (McQuail, 1987:117-8) Overall, society is entitled to high standards, and intervention is considerable justifiable if the media fail to meet these standards.

During the mid-20th century in democratic countries, press councils developed in conjunction with the emergence of the social responsibility theory of the press, (Oosthuizen, 2002:58) whereas in South Africa under apartheid, the normative framework was very different and the National Party coerced the media to implement 'voluntary' codes of conduct. (Oosthuizen, 2002:71) Although the self-regulation of the media, enshrined in the ANC's current Media Charter, is being questioned in the latest draft policy document, it is only since 1994 that journalists have been left, largely, to govern themselves. It was the transition to democracy, posited Nel, (2007:337) that prompted the South African media to become more professional. Along with the freedom to self govern comes responsibility and a duty

to behave ethically. Whether or not its practitioners adhere to codes of conduct is another matter.

2.6 Journalism's Guiding Principles

However, serious journalists realise that acting truthfully is among their primary duties and obligations to society. To do so, they need to operate independently, and decisions must be weighed so as to minimise harm. (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996) "We can use these three obligations as our guiding principles, and then further define each by incorporating other basic duties of journalism." (Steele, 1992) A further consideration is that journalists must be accountable. (SPJ, 1996) These guiding principles are supported in normative ethics and theories of the press.

These principles have been fleshed out comprehensively in the code of ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in America. The following is an excerpt from this code.

> Seek Truth and Report It: Journalists should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information. Journalists should avoid error and distortion; give subjects an opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing; identify sources when possible, questioning motives for anonymity. They should also avoid surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional methods will not result in acquiring information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
>
> Minimise Harm: Ethical journalists should treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect. Journalists should show compassion and sensitivity, recognise the right to privacy, show good taste and judgement in identifying victims of sex crimes and juveniles.
>
> Act Independently: Journalists should act independently, avoiding conflict of interest, refusing gifts and favours. They must be free of associations and activities that compromise integrity, free of any obligation other than the public's right to know. They must hold those in power accountable, denying favoured treatment. Journalists must be wary of sources offering information for favours of money; they must avoid bidding for news.

> Be Accountable: Journalists must be accountable to their audience, inviting dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct; they must admit mistakes and correct them, expose unethical practices (sic) of journalism and encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media. They must abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.
> (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996)

When one speaks of journalistic ethics, then, one speaks of more than regulated behaviour, but about principled and reasonable behaviour. "Journalists must decide for themselves, rather than having others decide for them, what information they will distribute, and what form that information will take." (Black et al, 1995:31)

2.7 Political Economy of the Media

While professional and socially responsible journalists should act in a way that supports the guiding principles, a political economy approach is very different, positioning the media in both a political and economic framework. The media, then, is perceived as being a business with products to sell and a resolved assessment of revenue. It is also perceived as being a tool by which media conglomerates ensure that the ruling classes prevail. In these terms journalism is neither accountable nor independent but performs "an ideological function, legitimizing the existing order on behalf of the ruling classes. Powerful elites dominate the media internationally and ensure that media products reinforce the dominant consensus." (Kruger, 2004:6)

Media conglomerates are commercial enterprises that manufacture goods and distribute them. In advertising-supported broadcasting the

> "audiences themselves are the primary commodity. The economics of commercial broadcasting revolves around the exchange of audiences for advertising revenue...and in prime-time, the premium prices are commanded by shows that can attract and hold the greatest number of viewers and provide a symbolic environment in tune with consumption." (Golding & Murdoch, 1997:75)

"It is difficult to assess the social impact of market journalism with precision. No one has determined what proportion of American news media has abandoned normative journalism for a market approach." (McManus, 1994:183) While such views are anathema to journalists, "most news production in the United States has been a business and news therefore a commodity – something bought and sold." (McManus, 1999:59)

2.7.1 Competition

With emphasis on profitability across a multitude of channels there is the inevitable competition, and the commodities bought and sold are done so with the consumer in mind. Day (2003:213) states that "competitive pressures have made the temptation to resort to the herd mentality quite alluring, and checkbook (sic) journalism is not that uncommon even among mainstream media." The Australian Press Council agrees that "the driver of chequebook journalism is media competition – the very thing proponents of cross-media ownership regulations want to promote". ("Paying for the News," 2005) Indeed "with increasing competition, money is again becoming a tool of the trade, and the press might as well stop hiding behind ethics policies." (Veraldi as cited in Heyboer, 1999)

2.8 Ethics of Chequebook Journalism

This political economy approach to the media would then seem to be well supported by chequebook journalism, which Day (2003:214) describes as "nothing more than a needless capitulation of journalistic values to commercial interests". However, before discussing the ethics of chequebook journalism, one must understand the concept as well as the contingent issues.

2.8.1 Definitions

A strict definition of **chequebook journalism** means that a journalist has paid for a story, or has paid the subject of a story for information. It goes against normative journalistic values and raises serious questions about credibility as there is the potential that with a commercial arrangement comes the possibility of an exaggerated, or even a fabricated story. Chequebook journalism not only distorts the truth, it has also distorted justice where witnesses in criminal trials were paid for their stories by the press. It rendered their testimonies unreliable and criminals were set free.

Paying for footage in this context means paying a source involved with the content of the videotape. Paying for videotape shot by a professional cameraman does not involve the same risk as paying for videotape from a source with a motive. It is an aspect of journalism relevant only to television;

A **Second hand payment** is when a journalist 'A' acquires a story for free after facilitating an arrangement between the source requesting payment and journalist 'B', who does pay. The benefit to the facilitating journalist is the right to broadcast the story as soon as journalist 'B' breaks it. Technically journalist 'A' has not paid;

Paying for exclusivity differs from chequebook journalism only in that the subject is not allowed to speak to any other journalist after being paid. The problem with buying an exclusive is that it also limits exposure in the public sphere with implications for democracy and is tantamount to paying a source, with the same arguments of potential exaggeration and fabrication;

Paying subjects in impoverished regions is to assist with money or groceries when shooting in regions that are economically challenged. Depending on how and when payment is made, there could be a material effect on the outcome of the story. There is another aspect in that a market for payments is created in such areas.

Paying consultants is when an expert in a field is paid to give an opinion. There is some debate that when a consultant is paid, it may influence the opinion given. It is important for all to recognise that it is the time that is being paid for, and not the opinion;

Paying for expenses is to give subjects airline tickets, accommodation, meals, etc. There is an issue with paying for expenses when limits are not set, and the payment could thus be viewed as inducing or bribing a source;

Producing a story that the channel has paid for is also strictly not chequebook journalism. However the point is that someone affiliated with the program has paid for it. While the program may not have paid, the channel/station has;

An **intimated payment** is when a journalist implies that exposure from being on television may have economic benefits. It happens more on some programs than others, and can be used as an inducement for reluctant sources to appear on screen;

There are **issues of geography** where certain expenses must be paid in developing countries/conflict zones that would not conceivably be paid for in South Africa, such as:

> **Paying for access,** which is to pay someone other than a fixer to facilitate an interview. It means that money has changed hands in the pursuit of an interview;
>
> A **Fixer** is a facilitator, usually a journalist and usually hired to assist a journalist when working in a foreign country. An unprincipled fixer could compromise a production, but there is a further ethical debate about **paying a fixer** as a source, even if that fixer is the only one capable of providing information;

Paying for passage is when a journalist finds it necessary to pay officials to get through a road block or a border post. These are payments that are necessary for safe voyage - the so-called "missing page" in the passport;

Paying for accreditation is often bribery in disguise. These are sometimes exorbitant costs simply to enter a country.

All of the above could, in some circumstances, be considered chequebook journalism. The study of each will contribute to a body of knowledge of descriptive ethics.

2.9 The Debates

Worldwide, chequebook journalism is unique in the 'shalt nots' of good journalism. It is generally censured by media ethicists, yet usually ignored in codes of conduct. Whereas issues of race, gender, deception, privacy, etc. are all explored in some depth in media academic books and journals, next to nothing is said about paying for stories. There is a major discrepancy – unless journalists are specifically told they should not pay for stories, they would not be aware of their error in doing so as it is not proscribed in codes of ethics, and may be one of the reasons why Nel (2007:333) observed that codes of ethics are "observed mainly in the breach".

Media ethicists in America are adamant that the exchange of money in journalism raises questions about credibility, but without definite codes it is difficult to monitor. In fact, when the Poynter Institute investigated the codes of ethics of over 30 newspapers, it discovered that only half had any kind of specifics about dealing with sources, and "(f)ew included outright statements that the newspaper never pays sources for information." (Heyboer, 1999) The code of ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) in America, as outlined earlier in this document, only mentions it vaguely, using phrases like "Be wary" and "avoid". (Society of Professional Journalists ethics code, 1996) Such wording leaves the door wide open.

The Poynter Institute for Media Studies in America is unequivocal in their standpoint. According to Bob Steele, director of the ethics program, "(t)he standard line is news organisations don't pay for information. The public perceives that the information is tainted by financial motives…They will discount the value of [it]". (as cited in Heyboer,1999)

Other analysts are concerned that it devalues journalism. "Good journalists would surely boast that they got an exclusive story by sheer determination, digging and fact checking. It's not much of a journalistic boast to say the story was won because 'we outbid the rest'. Journalists become less relevant in chequebook journalism." ("Paying for the News", 2005:2)

Some codes of ethics only concern themselves with chequebook journalism when it comes to paying prisoners. In Australia, there are laws that prevent criminals from financially benefitting from their crimes. (Australian Press Council, Feb. 2005) America has attempted similar legislation, but it was found to be unconstitutional. (Flint, 2005) However, when NewsCorp planned a network special to coincide with the launch of OJ Simpson's book "If I did it", they were forced to cancel both the publication and the television program due to negative outcry from the public. It was thought not only to be distasteful, but there was major concern that Simpson would profit from the murders. (*NewsCorp cancels OJ Simpson book and TV special,* 2006)

Chequebook journalism is considered to be the way of the tabloids – print and broadcast – and while it is tolerated, even accepted that they engage in such practices, normative theories, ethics and press codes are such that the public expects more of the mainstream press. It is considered an abuse of power and antithetical to freedom of the press, and also raises suspicion as to the veracity of the story.

However Iain Calder, ex-editor of *The National Enquirer,* a tabloid newspaper, claims that "everyone" does it, only the "others furiously hide their tracks". (Gabler, 2004) He may have a point. While CBS issued vehement denials, *The New York Times* reported that in 2003 they paid Michael Jackson $1m for a *60 Minutes* interview. A source close to Jackson claimed that "they paid him from the entertainment budget, and CBS just shifts around the money internally. That way *60 Minutes* can say that *60 Minutes* didn't pay for the interview." (Jeffries, 2007) "It undermines the [profession] to pretend they have rules and then find a way to get around them." (Veraldi as cited in Heyboer, 1999)

When socialite Paris Hilton completed jail time for drunk driving, though, a bidding war broke out amongst the American networks. Reports were that NBC had offered 'high six figures' for her first interview, beating the low six figures ABC was offering. (Jeffries, 2007)

Media rivalry has extended even further. American magazine publishers are now being pressured to give their large advertisers editorial content in advance, so they have the option to pull their ads if the content offends them. (McChesney, 1998:19) As the adage in the commercial world goes, the customer is king.

There are journalists who argue that information is a product similar to other goods or services they would pay for, like legal advice and circulation figures. Gregg Easterbrook, senior editor of *The New Republic*, sees it in terms of intellectual property. "I don't see why professional reporters should be the only ones to profit from producing news...We in the press seem to think [people] should surrender their privacy and submit to our embarrassing questions so that we can make money off it." (as cited in Selcraig, 1994)

While that may be a minority view, media academic Robert Boynton (2008) also notes that there is always some currency attached to journalism. Whether it is

emotional, ideological, or financial, "journalism always involves a transaction of some kind". While he is not saying that journalists should compensate their sources, he does believe that in some situations it is not the worst action a journalist can take.

> "How convenient that our personal gain and our profession's ethical principles are so perfectly aligned! Isn't it possible that this prohibition is simultaneously true and a way of banishing awkward questions of money and exchange from our moral calculations? In the murky intimacy that comes with immersion reporting, we owe our sources everything. Perhaps this is why we try so hard to avoid the topic." (Boynton, 2008)

Predictably, media ethicists recoil from such logic, saying that "exchanging money for information...leads to questions about whether the source is being truthful or embellishing for the sake of more cash". (Selcraig, 1994)

While the SPJ code does clarify ethics in many spheres of journalism, it does not go into detail about chequebook journalism.

2.10 Chequebook Journalism and the Guiding Principles

The ethics of chequebook journalism, then, can probably be best assessed when seen in the light of the guiding principles.

2.10.1 Truth telling

In terms of truth telling, there is consensus amongst academics and analysts alike that employing such practices potentially alters the outcome, i.e. sources that are paid tend to give journalists what they want. Day (2003:214) states that "paid interviewees may feel financially obligated to perform or produce something of journalistic interest," which he claims could lead to a certain amount of hyperbole, embellishment and possibly a story that is completely manufactured. As one

newspaper editor pithily remarked, “paying for news, like paying for love, tends to cast doubts on the sincerity of the transaction”. (as cited in Selcraig, 1994)

The truth becomes difficult to establish as sources may withhold information hoping for a second installment, or try to give the journalists value for money. The process of buying exclusives also prohibits the free flow of information, affecting truth, democracy and the public sphere. (Oosthuizen, 2002:3)

2.10.2 Minimising harm

In Britain the most serious controversies concerning chequebook journalism involve payments offered to witnesses in pending, major trials. (Franklin, 2005:35) Several incidents in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia have surfaced over the past decade in which witnesses in high profile criminal cases have sold their stories to the press, rendering their testimonies unreliable. The cases were overturned and alleged criminals went free. The state of chequebook journalism in the UK has at times so corrupted the law that there was a move towards banning the practice of paying for stories altogether. (Higham, 2003) Not only is there the fear that a witness who has been paid may exaggerate their claims to justify being paid, but it was found that there was a more ominous aspect, as in the case of singer Gary Glitter. Accused of indecent assault, Glitter was acquitted when it was learned that, not only had a witness been paid prior to the hearing, but the *News of the World* promised said witness a much larger sum if Glitter was convicted, the implication being that the witness would embellish his or her story to Glitter’s detriment. In any event, justice was not done. (Higham, 2003)

There was a comparable case in South Africa a few years ago. When Donovan Moodley was arrested and was awaiting trial for the kidnap and murder of Leigh Matthews, he apparently confessed his crimes to his cell mate, Johnny du Preez.

YOU magazine bought the story from du Preez and published Moodley's alleged confession. The case was sub judice. *YOU*'s actions were illegal and could have perverted the course of justice. *YOU*'s lawyer argued that the sub judice law was outdated and that *YOU* magazine published the 'confession' in the interest of the public. While the media were outraged, no action was taken against *YOU* by the law or the media. ("Leigh 'confession' furore," 2004)

The United States and Australia have had similar concerns about chequebook journalism corrupting the course of justice. In 2005 the Australian Press Council released Reporting Guidelines regarding witness payment in trials, recommending that "(n)o payment or offer of payment to a witness, or any person who may reasonably be expected to be called as a witness, should be made in any case once proceedings have commenced". (Australian Press Council, 2005) However, it does recognize that on occasion "publications will pay sources to ensure that matters of public interest and concern that might not otherwise be published are made available to readers". (APC, 2005)

2.10.3 Acting Independently

Conflicts of interest occur when journalists have to contend with competing allegiances "to a source, to their own self-interest, or to their organisation's economic needs as opposed to the information needs of the public". (Black, Steele & Barney, 1995:91) A journalist's integrity is compromised when decisions are not made purely on the value of the information itself, but when the price paid for a story is also taken into account.

Chequebook journalism likewise challenges journalistic autonomy "because an economic investment in information may elevate it to a position of unjustified prominence relative to other sources of information." (Day, 2003:212)

Simply put, a commercial transaction between a journalist and a source connects them. They become related parties and the journalist no longer acts as an independent being.

2.10.4 Accountability

Paying for stories likewise raises a huge question mark over accountability, abiding by high standards and discourse with the public about the behaviour of the media. There is no question that paying for interviews engages less than lofty ideals of journalism. And while there is an expectation that the tabloids do pay for stories, the public is relatively unaware that the mainstream press does sometimes indulge. When *Hustler* magazine's publisher Larry Flynt issued an ad offering $1m to any journalist who could expose information on the extramarital affairs of members of Congress, one journalist unearthed a scandal and the money was paid. While mainstream newspapers were offended by the method, they nonetheless ran the story themselves. (Heyboer, 1999) It was not a high point in journalistic accountability.

2.11 South African Codes of Ethics Regarding Chequebook Journalism

The guidelines in South Africa concerning payment for stories are as nebulous as those outlined by the SPJ, which declares only that "(j)ournalists must be wary of sources offering information for favours or money; they must avoid bidding for news". (SPJ, 1996)

The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) states the following:

> "No payment shall be made to persons involved in crime or other notorious behaviour, or to persons who have been engaged in crime or other notorious behaviour, in order to obtain information concerning any such behaviour, unless compelling societal interests indicate the contrary." (ICASA, n.d)

The code for the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) is the same as ICASA's code, while the Press Code of Professional Practice is no more illuminating:

> "No payment shall be made for feature articles to persons engaged in crime or other notorious misbehaviour, or to convicted persons or their associates, including family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, except where the material concerned ought to be published in the public interest and the payment is necessary for this to be done." (Press Code of Professional Practice, 2006)

So while chequebook journalism is not strictly forbidden in terms of South African press and broadcasting codes, "the whole practice of chequebook journalism is deeply suspect". (Retief, 2002:137) But again, other than specifying that criminal acts or behaviour are not to be rewarded, the code is open-ended. If there are general concerns that codes of ethics are not explicit and ambiguous, such statements certainly would not clarify matters and inspire commitment to the principles.

However the Press Code does go on to say:

> "(T)he public interest is the only test that justifies departure from the highest standards of journalism and includes: Detecting or exposing crime or serious misdemeanor; detecting or exposing serious anti-social conduct; protecting public health or safety; preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organization; detecting or exposing hypocrisy, falsehoods or double standards of behaviour on the part of public figures or institutions or in public institutions."
> (Press Code of Professional Practice, 2006)

It is noteworthy that information acquired in the public interest is deemed of such significance that it alone is exempt from the highest standards of journalism.

2.12 A Brief History and Overview of Chequebook Journalism

2.12.1 International Overview

Although chequebook journalism would seem to be a late 20th century phenomenon, its alleged origins date back almost a century. The first documented case of paying for a story occurred in 1912, when *The New York Times* paid $1000 for an exclusive interview with the wireless operator of the Titanic. (Selcraig, 1994) Several years later, Heart Newspapers paid legal bills for the defendant in the Lindbergh baby kidnapping/murder case in the 1930's to assure exclusive scoops during the trial. (Selcraig, 1994)

Life magazine likewise paid the Mercury astronauts for their stories in the 1960's (Day, 2003:212) and award winning American current affairs program *60 Minutes* paid Watergate criminals H.R. Haldeman and G. Gordon Liddy handsomely for interviews. (Heyboer, 1999) "It tends to surface during a crisis, like Watergate or O.J. Simpson." (Veraldi as cited in Heyboer, 1999)

Certainly the William Kennedy Smith rape trial, the OJ Simpson trial, and the President Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair were watershed events that promoted chequebook journalism to an all time high. Since then, the practice of paying sources has become so widespread in American television that many feel it now threatens the fundamental credibility of TV news. "There is a line but nobody knows where to draw it anymore." (Sharkey, 1994) Some American newspapers have felt that they have needed to declare openly that they do not pay for stories, so ubiquitous has the practice become. (Heyboer, 1999) In fact, American journalists and broadcasters who refuse to engage in purchasing stories have found that they've been frozen out of key interviews. (Day, 2003:211)

In the UK, it was Princess Diana who inspired the tabloids, and chequebook journalism, to new heights, although chequebook journalism has always been "as much a part of our culture as coronation chicken". (Platell, 2003) The Australian Press Council has published several articles about trepidation on the part of media academics regarding the extent of chequebook journalism in that country. In fact, it would appear that many first world English speaking countries engage in chequebook journalism in some shape or form.

2.12.2 Local Overview

While some may decry the state of journalism in South Africa, the known occurrences of chequebook journalism are few and far between. The most controversial case was the *Rapport/*Strydom saga, in 1992. In late 1988, 23-year-old Barend Strydom, a member of the racist group "Wit Wolve", drove his car downtown Pretoria and walked to Strijdom Square. Loaded down with a 9 mm pistol, two magazines and a few hundred bullets, Strydom went on a killing spree, shooting any black person in his line of fire. By the time he was arrested he had killed 8 people and wounded many others in what was later deemed a politically motivated crime. (Strydom to testify in Boeremag trial, 2004); (The Strydom Square Massacre, n.d.)

Strydom was convicted and sentenced to death, but after spending a couple of years in jail, he was released in 1992 due to an amnesty. Although he disappeared after his release, a sympathetic story about Strydom soon appeared in *Rapport*. It transpired that the newspaper had purchased the exclusive publication rights from him for a reported sum of R20,000.00.

The-then Media Council's code of conduct stipulated that journalists were not to pay "criminals or persons engaged in misbehaviour for sensational articles or programmes", and a complaint was laid. *Rapport* appealed against the finding and

won, as it was noted that Strydom was not involved in criminal activity at the time of the payment. (Roelofse, 1993:88) ICASA has subsequently amended that clause to include "people who have been engaged in crime", (ICASA, n.d.) and the Press Code now states: "No payment shall be made for feature articles to persons engaged in crime or other notorious misbehaviour, or to convicted persons or their associates..." (Press Code of Professional Practice 2006)

While the issue didn't create waves amongst the public, it brought chequebook journalism and the ethics thereof under the media spotlight in South Africa. Professor Willie Esterhuyse of Stellenbosch University observed that morality seemed to be viewed as a technicality; "it does not matter whether behaviour is good, but whether one can get away with it". (as cited in Roelofse, 1993:88) J.J. Roelofse (1993:89) concluded that *Rapport's* behaviour was technically correct, but irresponsible and ultimately unethical.

Five years ago, some prisoners had video cameras smuggled into Grootvlei Prison in Bloemfontein. What they were able to surreptitiously capture on tape was so horrific that an inquiry, the Jali Commission of Inquiry into South African Prisons, which had been ongoing at the time was given further impetus and specifically investigated the tapes as broadcast on SABC's *Special Assignment*. South African jails were altered as a result. Twenty-two officials were suspended with one being criminally charged, and remedial action was taken including the prevention of contact between juveniles and adult offenders. (The Jali Commission, n.d.) This would not have happened had the tapes not been smuggled out and purchased by *Special Assignment*, and then broadcast to the nation.

Special Assignment likewise broadcast sensational footage in which police dogs savaged a Mozambican man who had gained illegal entry into South Africa. Pandemonium resulted when the story was broadcast and several policemen were

convicted of crimes. However amongst the media questions were asked about how the tapes were attained and whether they had been paid for.

Chapter 3

Method

3.1 Introduction

As the broad aim of this paper is to understand attitudes towards chequebook journalism, the method of research was a qualitative approach. Three television actuality programs from three different channels investigated were:

1. *Carte Blanche* produced by M-Net;
2. *Special Assignment* produced by SABC3;
3. *3rd Degree* produced by e-tv.

These three programs were chosen because they are the flagship actuality programs for their particular channels, and represent the best of investigative journalism in the electronic media in South Africa. There are expectations from viewers that these programs will deliver in-depth reports that do not surface in other media. For this reason, they are most likely to be offered stories for purchase where other programs are not.

3.2 Part one

Research methods were initially based on semi-structured interviews with the executive producers of each program: George Mazarakis, Debora Patta, and former executive producer and creator Jacques Pauw. The purpose of the interviews was to establish the ethics surrounding the practice of chequebook journalism on each program. Executive Producers were asked when/if they have been offered stories, what their reactions have been; when/if they have made decisions to buy stories, videotape, exclusives, and their rationale for doing so. The discussion extended slightly to incorporate some of the other issues surrounding chequebook journalism, outlined in Chapter 2, and various subjects relevant to the particular program. They

were asked about the attitude at their respective channels; discussion and communication about ethics within their own programs; and their understanding of chequebook journalism generally in the industry.

The net was then cast further to include interviews with field producers on these programs, those at the coal face so to speak, as their experiences could very well differ from program policy or ideology. They were questioned about situations in which they may have produced reports where it was necessary to pay for information; if geography had any bearing on the way they conducted the production; about their thoughts on the subject when in the field.

Former *Carte Blanche* presenter Ruda Landman and current *Carte Blanche* presenter Derek Watts were also interviewed for their depth of experience and knowledge, having been with the program since its inception twenty years ago.

Several foreign journalists were included in the discussion of geography to establish a context. South African journalists working on the programs under discussion do not take up residency in other countries and as such their methods of newsgathering in third world countries may be tempered by lack of knowledge of culture, custom and problems of access. Additional people interviewed included journalists currently or formerly employed by Reuters, CNN and an independent journalist who works for various major international networks. Only in speaking to such people could a norm be derived. It was then easy to assess whether the production methods South African journalists utilised were standard.

The data collected up to this point was from transcripts of the interviews with analysis of thematic content. The strength of a semi-structured interview is that the basic outline of each interaction has a similar framework, which makes comparisons easier, yet gives latitude to diverge if interesting information is revealed, or a different tack is required. The intimate one-to-one basis of the discussion possibly

prompted more revelations than a group interview would have. On the other hand, the joint interview with Anna-Maria Lombard and Jacques Pauw was successful in that it stimulated dialogue between the two journalists, in which one remembered incidents the other had forgotten.

Interviews were taped and transcriptions produced. From there they were evaluated according to thematic content analysis.

3.3 Challenges of Interviews

The primary weakness is, of course, that interviewees may choose not to reveal moments of ethical weakness, or situations that cast them in a bad light, electing to portray a more positive picture. Many of them may also not remember situations and circumstances.

There were problems initially in contacting enough journalists - specifically the right people to interview, as some have left the program, the country, did not want to speak/refused to be interviewed, etc. Busy schedules were also a challenge. Interviews began in January 2008 and carried on for most of the year as arranging and conducting some of the interviews took months at times. Contact with e-tv was extremely limited as no interaction was allowed with anyone on the program except for Debora Patta. It was not possible to speak to *3rd Degree* producers who may have had relevant experiences in the field. However, Joe Thloloe spoke in his capacity as both Press Ombudsman as well as former editor-in-chief at e-tv.

3rd Degree has also not experienced the depth of incidents involving payment, nor do they have the resources to have to make decisions that are likely to be much more than hypothetical. The live interview format of *3rd Degree* is substantially different to the other two programs. Consequently much of the anecdotal information in this research report was provided by *Special Assignment* and *Carte*

Blanche, and not by *3rd Degree*. For that reason the focus is primarily on the latter two programs.

3.4 Part two of the research report asks if the practice of chequebook journalism as outlined by all producers and presenters is in line with audience views. Interaction and debate is essential, as it forces people to think more closely about their responses and thus is best approached in focus groups. "The hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group." (Morgan 1997:2) The focus groups were structured with high moderator influence, and used as a self-contained means of collecting data.

According to Morgan (1997:43) a project should consist of between three to five groups as "more groups seldom provide meaningful new insights", thus the decision to conduct four homogeneous groups. One group consisted of women with a 6-7 Living Standards Measure (LSM); the second group men with 6-7 LSM. The third and fourth groups were conducted with women and men respectively, all of whom were in the 9-10 LSM. In dividing the groups in such a manner, it could be determined whether the responses to questions about such ethical issues had a class or gender bias as more sophisticated audiences may not be as concerned about paying for stories, whereas the lower LSMs might have been feel less comfortable with it, etc. It was also interesting to note whether one gender or another had more difficulty with the ethics of chequebook journalism.

There were 6 or 7 people in each focus group. In planning the focus groups, the four criteria as described by Merton et al (as cited in Morgan, 1997) were taken into account: range; depth; specificity; personal context. Recruitment was done by convenience sampling, a method of sampling attitudes in a population that is inexpensive in terms of both cost and time. It is widely used in student research projects, ("Sampling Methods", n.d) the samples selected because they are

convenient. One of the venues was Lifestyle Nurseries, in which there are many disparate groups of people in various occupations. Lifestyle management selected which employees were to take part in the discussion after being given the parameters. The two focus groups conducted there were the lower LSM groups.

The other venue was a home in Johannesburg. People were chosen for being fairly forthcoming in their opinions, with a nod towards reflecting some kind of racial and career diversity in the groups.

There were obviously some variations in the questions asked in each focus group, depending on how quickly discussions progressed and whether the subjects raised were relevant. There was an attempt to juxtapose two scenarios; the first in which *YOU* magazine paid a subject for a story and in so doing broke the sub judice law. Their legal defence was that they felt their story was in the public interest. The second scenario was the case in which *Special Assignment* paid for videotape shot by prisoners at Grootvlei Prison. They broke the law (article 289 of the Prisons Act) stating that prisoners must not be paid cash which is exactly what transpired in the process of buying videotape. *Special Assignment*'s justification was also that their story was in the public interest.

These two cases were compared purposely to ascertain whether there was a voluntary acknowledgement of standards of journalism; whether there was a perceived difference in paying for a story versus paying for videotape; if members of focus groups distinguished between how the term "public interest" was bandied about; whether there was more latitude for print or for television; and whether methods used by producers should be transparent to the viewing audience. As time was of the essence it seemed an economical way to compare and contrast on many levels.

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed, and analysed according to themes and content.

The Living Standards Measure was judged in each group on the basis of occupation. In South Africa the LSM calculations are determined solely on what material possessions and amenities one has acquired or has access to. The lower LSM groups often did not have a television, although they had watched at least one of the three programs in the homes of family and friends. Some of them lived in informal settlements.

3.5 Challenges of Focus Groups

The challenges of the focus groups included finding the right people for each group and orchestrating the events. A lot depended on moderator input, which was inexperienced. There was a concern that people would not show up, would not to take part in the discussion, or conversely would dominate the group. There were time constraints, particularly with the lower LSM groups, and apprehension that the correct questions were not asked and answered.

Another challenge was the fact that most people in each of the focus groups had never given consideration to such issues. There was certainly a lack of knowledge about the way the field of journalism operates, which indicates that it is not as transparent as it should be. It was also difficult to convey these concepts to people for whom English was not a first language. Likewise, it was sometimes problematic for them to express clearly what their thoughts were.

The female 6-7 LSM group was particularly reluctant to participate. Several of the women seemed intimidated and never settled into the process.

3.6 Limitations

The audience samplings are narrow at best and were confined to the availability of participants.

This research also does not address the subject from the perspective of radio, print or internet, nor does it take into account television news. Indeed, it is not intended to be an exhaustive study, but rather samplings of perspectives about television actuality. Given the fact that no research has been done in this field in South Africa, it does provide some information that has not previously been available.

An ethical framework for chequebook journalism, with all its limitations, has thus been established in terms of audiences and those in the field.

Chapter 4

Findings: Interviews

"*Paying for stories is one of the biggest evils in journalism."*

Max du Preez, personal communication, July 25, 2008

4.1 Introduction

More than 20 journalists were interviewed for this research report, all of whom were asked about the ethics of paying for stories. However, it was the surrounding issues of payment for other reasons that became more pertinent in discussions. Journalists have to make a myriad of moral decisions regarding money, all of which were of concern. These issues form the bulk of the findings.

While South African press codes are unclear about chequebook journalism, interviews with *Carte Blanche* executive producer George Mazarakis*, 3rd Degree* executive producer Debora Patta and creator and former executive producer of *Special Assignment* Jacques Pauw, revealed a deep awareness of the potential negative consequences of purchasing stories. Pauw declared that he had never practiced chequebook journalism, because "how do I determine that what you say is true because if I pay you enough, you could say anything?" (J. Pauw, personal communication, April 8, 2008) Mazarakis stated that he felt chequebook journalism was lazy journalism "because it's just so much easier to pay someone and get a story. But of course you never ever know how truthful it is, and there's no way of checking." (G. Mazarakis, personal communication, April 4, 2008) Patta had similar views about chequebook journalism. "The problem is when you pay, you also throw sound journalistic principles to the wind." (D. Patta, personal communication, June 2008) They all spoke variously of the possibility of buying lies, exaggerations; about the risk of elevating a story because of the financial investment.

The three executive producers confirmed that the policy, both at their respective programs and channels, is that chequebook journalism is not acceptable.

While there is always the possibility that all were not completely open in discussion, it would appear that chequebook journalism is not a regular feature in these South African television current affairs programs. The television industry is small and producers migrate from program to program; if any one program behaved unethically as a matter of course, it would be known.

A stylistic note: The first quote from each journalist is followed by the day, month and year of the interview. Thereafter only the year is documented. In the case where more than one interview with a subject was conducted, the detail regarding date is noted again when information is culled from a different interview.

Also, "practise" has been substituted for the spelling "practice". This has been done because Americans do not make the distinction, and some academics, American or otherwise, have used the same word for both the noun and the verb.

4.2 Paying for stories

. *"Listen, it works for us to say we don't pay for interviews because it saves us on budget, especially for overseas stories. It's a wonderful thing to be able to say 'we don't pay' - you write this little moral thing ' we don't pay' which we've done – fantastic – because we don't have the money*."
Diana Lucas, personal communication, March 10, 2008

Much as the programs under discussion appear to be ethically driven, research for this report revealed that two *Carte Blanche* stories produced almost a decade ago in West Africa were paid for, apparently unbeknownst to George Mazarakis. They are clearly exceptions to the normal mode of gathering information, as when this matter was disclosed to him he was extremely disturbed by it. "I'm devastated to hear that she [producer Teri Leppan] paid for them." (G. Mazarakis, personal communication,

July 22, 2008) The producer claims that Mazarakis must have known she had paid. He is adamant he did not. According to him, his understanding was that any payments made were for production costs and safe passage. She believed that he knew that payments had been made to the sources themselves.

When asked whether she had told Mazarakis about paying for primary source interviews for these stories shot in Nigeria and Ghana, Leppan said "I don't think so. I had contingency money with me. On subsequent trips I'd discussed it with Jon [Sparks; managing producer for *Carte Blanche* responsible for finance] that I would need X amount to pay certain things … I don't remember there being any major discussion, or anything about it." (T. Leppan, personal communication, June 13, 2008) Yet Leppan insisted that he knew. "I have to justify to him for everything I spent." Mazarakis' response was unambiguous. "Yes she had to account to us for everything she spent, but for everything she spent that had an invoice."

Mazarakis described Leppan as a very principled individual. During a previous interview he had spoken about general concerns in sending a journalist to other countries when contact with the production office would be limited. "I think that the important thing is that you've got to know that the journalist you're sending in is a person of integrity, that that person is going to make decisions on the ground that are based in logic and sound ethical principles." (G. Mazarakis, personal communication, April 4, 2008) Leppan had produced most of the stories in continental Africa for *Carte Blanche* at the time in which *Carte Blanche* had a small but very influential African and Middle-Eastern audience. A MultiChoice subscription, payable in American dollars, was simply not affordable to the average viewer, and was regarded as a status symbol.

Both stories paid for were important ones, the first an account of cults/gangs who were intimidating staff and students on university campuses in Nigeria, and creating

an environment of insecurity. "I got feedback from some people that it had, for the first time, put it into perspective – that there was a sense of a whole story instead of the bits and pieces of information that people usually had." (T. Leppan, 2008) The second story, about the tradition of "trokosi" in Ghana whereby young women are sold into a lifetime of sex slavery for the sins of their fathers, was of great consequence.

During the interview Leppan spoke openly of paying her subjects. She did not believe she had transgressed any ethical code in paying for primary source interviews. She felt her moral dilemma was either to tell an incomplete story, or pay for the interviews necessary to relate the full narrative. She was convinced that the interviews could not be acquired in any other way, and the outcome of the trokosi story "was instrumental in stopping trokosi in Ghana". (T. Leppan, 2008) About the cult story she said, "...without speaking to the cult members what kind of a story do I have? Just in terms of journalistic integrity, all I'm doing is giving people a platform to say this is what the gangs do, this is what they're about and I'm not getting anything from the gangs themselves. So either one pays for the story, or you don't do it."

Leppan had produced a documentary about a group of hunter gatherers in Tanzania around the same time for an American channel in which she paid the sources. "I just put it in the budget. The budget went through without a word." (T. Leppan, personal communication, Jan. 28, 2008)

In Johannesburg, during the early 1990's before *Carte Blanche* began using hidden cameras and the morality of deception was yet to be deliberated, a team was sent to investigate a story of conflict between skin heads and punks in which a member of the former group had been killed with a baseball bat. The team tracked down the punks who were sleeping in their derelict encampment. Upon waking they were

aggressive initially, then began bragging about the encounter and their part in the murder. The cameraman, who had begun to roll tape when they found the punks asleep, captured the entire interaction. While it was explosive television, Derek Watts, the presenter of the story, felt very uncomfortable with the way in which the information had been gathered. "That guy's suddenly going to see himself on TV and he made a hell of a statement and I want him to know it's going to be on TV." (D. Watts, personal communication, April 1, 2008) He suggested going back to the punks and paying them for the interview as a way of alerting them to the fact that it had been videotaped, to which the erstwhile executive producer agreed. "I don't think it was terribly ethical or right, but it eased my conscience because I knew that he knew that it would be on TV." (D. Watts, 2008)

Two other journalists interviewed disclosed their own methods of dealing with people wanting to sell stories. Stephanie Woulters says she would say no, then would look into the story and do some research herself. (S. Woulters, personal communication, June 19, 2008) Max du Preez has a similar modus operandi.

> "I would say, 'well tell me first what the story is before I can tell you if I'm prepared to pay', and then people will tell you the story and you say, 'sorry we don't pay for stories' but then you have the story already. And then you do the story. You can start using other sources. If it's of overwhelming public interest you screw this guy, because the story does not belong to him." (M. du Preez, 2008)

4.3 Paying for videotape

"*I think there's very seldom exclusive footage coming out without in some way paying for it*."
*(*J. Pauw, 2008*)*

To some extent videotape is bought regularly whether it is stock footage, news footage from agencies such as Reuters, or entire documentaries from production houses locally or overseas. There is the perception that buying such videotape is in

a different league to buying stories; more reliable, solid evidence from trustworthy sources. The latter can be completely manufactured, while the former has been visually documented and is proof, as such; it is there for all to see. It is acknowledged that videotape can be edited to suggest a completely different reality, but for journalists of this calibre such suggestions are absurd. The doubt creeps in when buying videotape from questionable suppliers.

Currently, with the advent of citizen journalism and mini DVD cameras or even cell phones, any person with such a device could capture remarkable footage of extraordinary events, which all three executive producers allowed they would be prepared to buy in exceptional instances: First hand, documented evidence of a tsunami does not land on one's desk everyday, for example. Such events could easily be corroborated.

However, two incidents of videotape purchase have sparked great debate in the industry, both of which were aired on *Special Assignment*, both of which were bought from dubious sources with vested interests. The first was in 2001 – the so-called 'dogs video', in which six white East Rand policemen arrested three illegal Mozambican men and allowed their dogs to brutalise the men while they stood nearby, observing. A video of the event had been made, ostensibly for viewing at social events.

The video was stolen by a traffic cop from the same area, who initially contacted *Special Assignment*, then *Carte Blanche*, and back to *Special Assignment* in his quest to strike a lucrative business deal. *Carte Blanche* was not interested, but *Special Assignment* was convinced of its authenticity. "We started making enquiries because he gave us the names of the policemen; the policemen were still on duty...and then we started talking money with him." (J. Pauw, 2008) In the end, the outrageous sum requested was reduced to fifty thousand rand, and was delivered,

in cash, to the traffic cop. The amount was rationalised by taking the length of the video – approximately 12 minutes – and multiplying it by the per minute production rate – which was R4,000 per minute. "So this is the way we justified it. First of all, we're not paying for the story, we're paying for the material. And second of all, it was in the public interest." (J. Pauw, 2008)

The second such incident happened in mid-2003, when prisoners in Grootvlei Prison outside Bloemfontein had video cameras smuggled into prison and had taken remarkable footage of the corruption and immorality inside. Their lawyer contacted all three programs in an attempt to get the best transaction for his clients. George Mazarakis looked at the footage but when told there was a price tag, he rejected the tape believing it was unethical to buy it. "It was difficult to lose that story because it was a story I would have loved to have had." (G. Mazarakis, personal communication, April 4, 2008). Mazarakis says he takes an absolutist stance on such matters. While it is difficult, he says he would try to maintain that approach for as long as possible.

Joe Thloloe, former editor-in-chief at e-tv news, had definite reasons for choosing not to purchase the tape himself, but does not condemn the SABC for using it, saying "they took other things into account. Ethical problem issues always raise questions that one person would see differently from another, so it's always very subjective." (J. Thloloe, personal communication, July 9, 2008) And while he was not offered the police dogs tape, he thinks that if he had, he possibly would have made the same decision *Special Assignment* did. His criteria for buying videotape is that the footage must be in the public interest, must be newsworthy, and that he is "satisfied that the person who is selling this footage doesn't have motives that I would despise". Clearly Thloloe was dissatisfied with the motives of the seller, as the videotape was profoundly newsworthy, and in the public interest.

Special Assignment bought the material with similar justifications as the dog video, i.e. that they were paying for the material, and it was in the public interest. They paid R60,000 in cash to the three inmates who had shot the videotape; three bags containing R20,000 each. The Jali Commission into jails was in progress at the time. The *Special Assignment* program added new impetus to the commission.

Jacques Pauw not only went against the BCCSA and ICASA's codes in paying the prisoners, but he broke the law as well. Article 289 of the Prisons Act states that "no person may without lawful authority supply or convey to any prisoner, or hide or place for his use, any document, intoxicating liquor, dagga, drug, opiate, money or any other article".

There was support for Pauw's decision. "If you're convinced that the video is authentic, then you have to say to yourself, how important is it that this incident becomes public knowledge and if you decide it is authentic and it is of overwhelming public importance that this thing be aired, then I say pay and if your opposition wants to pay more, then pay more." (M. du Preez, 2008) Although du Preez vociferously objects to chequebook journalism, he is adamant that the public interest is of paramount consideration in decisions such as the one to buy the prison tapes. "I would break the law, especially if it's something as silly as a prisoner isn't allowed to receive money. It's not a moral law that I'm breaking, it's just a practical regulation."

Pauw and du Preez similarly feel that some journalists avoid securing stories by allowing ethics to get in the way. "People say 'we can't do it. It's unethical.' That's nonsense. Very few things, I think, in journalism are unethical. I think as long as you can justify that it's in the public interest, and it's true, then you have to do the story. I think it's as simple as that." (J. Pauw, 2008). While disdainful of press codes, ("I'm quite frankly not interested in the press codes at all. I had no part in it, I don't know

who drew it up, I've nothing to do with them") Pauw's opinion is exactly what is expressed in South Africa's press code, which states that "the public interest is the only test that justifies departure from the highest standards of journalism". (Press Code of Professional Practice, 2006)

Both the Press Code and ICASA's code specify that prisoners, alone, should not be paid for stories, which prompted varying responses. Pauw felt comfortable with it in the circumstances described above. There was also generally strong opinion that prisoners who had completed their time in jail should be allowed to make a living from their experiences, as some prisoners in this country have. Among them are Clayton McKenzie, one of the prisoners who had videotaped inside Grootvlei prison, and Alan Heyl, a former member of the Stander gang. George Mazarakis had a different response to most of the interviewees, particularly with regard to Heyl.

> "I think it's wrong. I think no one should profit...he's a criminal. Why would we glorify a criminal?...I think that it's dangerous to keep interviewing him...because it would give him a platform from which to earn more money out of the spoils of his crime. In his case crime has paid...and in some ways the media has aided and abetted him because we've made him famous. We allowed him to become more famous." (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

Mazarakis feels fervently that, with the exception of present-day Zimbabwe, it is not a journalist's place to break laws. "I think there was a time in apartheid when it was appropriate to be antinomialist in your ethical approach as a journalist. I don't think that that holds any more in South Africa. I mean I would never – my rule to my staff is don't break the law to tell a story."

Joe Thloloe has a similar viewpoint. " There are always ways of getting the same story and doing it legally, because you can't try and ride a higher horse when you yourself are not clean. That's the bottom line. If you are going to accuse people of wrong doing, you must make sure that you yourself haven't done any wrong."

While the police dogs video was not offered to e-tv, Debora Patta also says she would have considered it. "I can't say to you, 'we will never pay' because had we been offered that footage and ultimately the only way we were going to get it was to pay for it, the principle of public interest becomes far more important, and it was a very very important story for the country, so absolutely yes, there are times when you pay for footage."

While he was head of TV news at the SABC, Thloloe made the decision to buy footage when there were differing accounts of a clash between the community and police in the Free State. An amateur photographer had taken videotape, which he offered to the SABC in exchange for a new camera as his had been damaged in the contretemps with police. Thloloe bought him the camera and kept the footage. (J. Thloloe, 2008)

The issue of motive and intent of a person wanting to sell a story or videotape is one that most interviewees feel journalists must be aware of. "It's not that one suddenly had a Road to Damascus, 'see the light' kind of experience, it's a lot of time to protect themselves or to get revenge. And as journalists we've got to unpack those kinds of things." (D. Patta, 2008) However, Pauw feels that a motive of revenge is how stories get broken. "It's about people settling scores. The vast majority of stories are broken like that…so yeah, I think you have to take it into account, you have to discuss it, but I don't think that would be the deciding factor." (2008)

There is another consideration. "Did this tape exist by itself before there was a price on it, or was this created because there would be a price on it?"(R. Landman, personal communication, March 6, 2008)

One criticism that has been levelled against *Special Assignment* from all quarters is their decision not to immediately reveal the fact of the payment in both cases. "It's

one thing to protect your sources but how you obtained it is possibly the most important part of the story." (D. Patta, 2008) " ... maybe even letters on the screen rolling, or a presenter saying 'we bought this video'." (M. du Preez, 2008) Jacques Pauw and Annaliese Burgess both allowed that stating the fact of the purchase up front in the introduction might have been a better way of dealing with it. The details were eventually revealed, but only after questions were asked. It may have tarnished the credibility of the program by not divulging the information upfront. (A. Burgess, personal communication, April 23, 2008)

4.4 Second-hand payments

George Mazarakis has at times assisted the process of chequebook journalism. While he refuses to pay for stories or interviews himself, there have been a couple presented to him that have been of interest. His decision has been to facilitate a relationship with a newspaper that he knows does pay. "I just set it up and I said, 'You go and talk to them. But I'm interested in the television story and will you give me the television story if I introduce you to someone else who will pay you for print? But I cannot pay you.' And they still have the choice to go to someone else." He is comfortable with this arm's length arrangement, saying it is up to the newspaper to verify the facts as *Carte Blanche* does its own investigation before taking on the story.

Special Assignment and *3rd Degree* made no mention of such arrangements.

4.5 Paying for Exclusives

It would appear that the print media in South Africa has fewer qualms about chequebook journalism than television actuality does. *YOU* and *Huisgenoot* magazines admit they pay for stories, but say it does not happen frequently. The consideration is "whether we need to sew the story up exclusively". (L. Pietersen, personal communication, June 28, 2007) Ms. Pietersen points out that "this is the

way journalism is increasingly going in the world and is by no means a new phenomenon".

There is a difference between paying for celebrity interviews and photographs of models and weddings, however, and publishing a confession allegedly made by Donovan Moodley to his cellmate before the kidnap and murder case of Leigh Matthews had gone to trial. Whether verbalised or not, there is an expectation that pictures of international models and interviews with celebrities come at a price, while news does not. *YOU* magazine was publicly condemned for publishing the Moodley confession but although they broke the press code and the sub judice law, no action was taken against them either legally or by the press ombudsman. (Yeld, Oct. 2004)

It was felt that Rapport overstepped the line in their interview with Barend Strydom. In paying him as they did (R20,000 in the early 1990's) and giving him the 'soft treatment', i.e. allowing him an opportunity to 'explain himself' they, in effect, elevated him to the status of a celebrity. (Roelofse, 1993) An interesting footnote: During interviews with Jacques Pauw, he revealed that he had been employed as a facilitator for a British production company making a documentary on Barend Strydom. He described how Strydom was driven around to the sites of his fury and was asked to re-enact the scenes. The shoot ended at the Voortrekker Monument, where they captured Strydom on tape, praying. "I discovered this right at the end, literally, when we said goodbye, that they gave him money. I still wrote a piece about it [for the Star] afterwards, about how disgusted I was about being a part of this whole operation where they paid this man." (J. Pauw, 2008)

While paying for "exclusives" does seem to be a feature in the entertainment and print media, it appears not to occur as such in the South African television actuality programs under discussion. It is acknowledged as chequebook journalism, and as seriously, it also limits exposure to the public sphere.

There are other, greyer areas surrounding journalism and money, less obvious and more insidious than chequebook journalism, involving issues that face journalists in the three aforementioned actuality programs on an almost daily basis.

4.6 Paying in impoverished areas

One of these issues involves shooting in impoverished areas. Among the twenty plus people interviewed on the subject, there appears to be a certain modus operandi that all the journalists feel comfortable with. Everyone spoke of buying groceries after a shoot or interview, buying lunch or giving a small gift of R50 or R100. It was never made a condition of the interview and was done after the fact. "We feel it's good manners to do so as they are helping us out and we should make a gesture of thanks." (K. Cullinan, personal communication, Oct. 19, 2008) It does smack of charity, but then that is exactly what it is. No one felt any ethical code was being violated. "I think it's reasonable to acknowledge your environment if you're in a very very poor place, to bear that in mind when you're asking people for favours." (N. Kotch, personal communication, July 24, 2008)

Diana Lucas feels that when shooting in such regions one must make a contribution towards expenses, when using their electricity, for example. She spoke about producing a story at the Fistula Hospital in Addis Ababa, which is run completely on charity. "I don't think you can just walk in there and not give anything, not pay a donation." (D. Lucas, 2008)

However, these sorts of gestures are not always so clearly delineated. Several years ago, the BBC spent some time documenting the rehabilitation of a Cape flats gang member while in prison. Ostensibly completely rehabilitated, *Special Assignment* continued the story when Mohammed left prison after being incarcerated for more than two decades. Executive producer Annaliese Burgess and crew resided with the former drug lord and his family when Mohammed vowed to keep up his

rehabilitated life on the outside. Mohammed's wife was unequivocal: If the crew intended living with the family, they would have to pay their own expenses. There was no money to feed them, let alone electricity to run the lights needed for the cameras. After some discussion it was decided that they would give Mohammed's wife a nominal location fee, which they would pay at the end of the shoot.

His wife continued to approach Burgess, however, saying there was no money for electricity or to buy groceries, and Burgess was forced to pay the location fee in R50 instalments. It soon became apparent to them that Mohammed was not living a straight life; that he had a severe and longstanding drug habit. "And there was a serious concern that we were enabling him in terms of his drug habit that we hadn't been aware of before. He was just stringing us along to get the money so we were basically kind of hostage to him." (A. Burgess, 2008) Their decision was to abandon the shoot and tell the story as well and as truthfully as they could, although they did not voice their suspicions that they had been funding the drugs.

4.7 Paying Consultants

Although it is the norm to pay expert witnesses in court cases in South Africa, consultants are not usually paid for giving expert opinion on television. Some journalists do not have a problem with paying consultants as they are "not the source – they're there to interpret what we're being told, they're there to help us understand what it is we've discovered because we cannot be experts in everything and we need to access expert opinion". (G. Mazarakis, 2008) While *Carte Blanche* does not normally pay for consultants, they have had to pay for a forensic auditor on a couple of occasions. "Now interestingly if you don't pay for him in that case, you can't respect his result." (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

3rd Degree states that they do not pay for consultants because of budgetary constraints but Debora Patta spoke of an experience that shocked them when

shooting in the United Kingdom. "We went ... to do a story on Maddie McCann and everyone wants to get paid! We were speaking to one policeman who was commenting ... and he said he'll do it, but we had to pay him, so we look at him in horror and then he said, 'this is how it's done. *Sky* pays me, this one pays me, that one pays me'." (D. Patta, 2008)

Diana Lucas, a producer of 20 years standing with *Carte Blanche*, concurs. She has only been approached for payment once, when producing a story in England on the Royal Watchers. "They say 'this is my time and this is how much it costs you,' and I think to myself 'I'm paying a cameraman, I'm paying a soundman, I'm paying a presenter, I'm paying myself, why do I not pay them for their time?'" (D. Lucas, 2008)

While with the SABC, George Mazarakis produced a documentary when South Africa was in pre-democratic discussions. After interviewing a constitutional expert at Athens University, the interviewee asked to be paid. When it was explained that payment was out of the question,

> "the academic said he felt that it was wrong that we didn't pay because he was an expert in his field and he earned his living from expressing academic opinions and delivering papers and what I was doing essentially was expecting him to deliver an academic opinion equal to what he would have done in an academic environment without the payment. And just because I came from South Africa and we had a different ethical base I was not necessarily right." (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

Not all consultants and experts ask to be paid, but those who do may see it in terms of the media exploiting their expertise or their time; that they have had to cancel 3 clients for the interview and feel they should be compensated. It's a delicate situation as if payment is made it needs to be clear that it is the time that is being paid for, and not the opinion. However, producers report that when they interview

experts they are sometimes asked how much they pay. There does not seem to be any come back when they say they do not.

There are spin-offs to being seen on television in a professional capacity, however, despite the lack of payment. It is the very public acknowledgement of one's expertise in a specific field, which can be worth a lot more than payment for a few lost hours.

4.8 Paying for travel expenses

Paying for travel expenses has traditionally been a grey area ethically when the expense allowance has been inflated and no receipts requested. It has all the insinuations of chequebook journalism though not the outward expression. It does seem to be a different situation in South African television current affairs, however, as media companies in South Africa do not seem to have the expendable funds they apparently do in the US, where networks would "give you $500 a day for 'food' and they don't care what you do with the money". (Selcraig, 1994)

Travel here is seen as a practicality, rather than a perquisite. Instead of flying a crew of three to Cape Town to shoot an interview with a source, it is far less expensive to fly one person to Johannesburg and conduct the interview in that city. As soon as the interview is over, the subject is flown back home. (G. Mazarakis, 2008) "They give up their day and we bloody fly them Kulula or something because *Carte Blanche* is really tight – I don't think they even give them lunch or anything." (D. Watts, 2008)

Many years ago, Dirk Coetzee, disgruntled with the apartheid police force, decided to inform the media about Vlakplaas, and the killing of anti-apartheid activists. Max du Preez, editor of the newly launched *Vrye Weekblad* organised for Coetzee to be given protection and flown to Mauritius for the interview. Jacques Pauw was also integral to the story. "It was overwhelmingly in the public interest to expose it and

the only way we could expose these death squads was by getting this man out of the country and the only way we could get him out of the country was to hand him over to the ANC ... We paid for his air ticket to London and we paid for his accommodation in Mauritius and that was basically it." (J. Pauw, 2008) "That is a form of payment, although that's not something they put in their pockets." (M. du Preez, 2008)

Nor can it be considered in the same category. It would be correctly justified as ethical treatment of a source. Coetzee's life was at stake in revealing the workings of the apartheid hit squads and he had to leave the country.

Ironically, the information Coetzee disclosed would never have come out had Max du Preez and Jacques Pauw not broken the law.

> "He [Coetzee] had gone to *Rapport* before, and he had gone to the *Sunday Times* before, with the same story. And they said 'No, it's against the law and it would be unethical for us to break the story'. And in the Sunday Times case, I believe somebody actually called the cops and said, 'here's a cop trying to peddle some stories on your internal workings'. So when we started *Vrye Weekblad*, we remembered Dirk Coetzee and we thought, 'well, we want that story, it's now time for that story.' And of course we broke the law! We were not allowed to do anything like that. We even broke some ethical codes because we didn't ask the police for their side of the story first. Which meant – that's part of journalistic ethics, is let the other side be heard. We did not let the other side be heard because I knew that they would stop me. They would come and blow us up, they would kill, they would stop the publication and we thought, at least that first one, let it come out. And all the other people shied away from the story in the name of principles and morals and laws and I was clear and I think again looking back that was a turning point. I mean if you look at the Truth Commission, this stuff started coming out after Dirk Coetzee spilled the beans. So it was very very important to break the rules there and break the law there." (M. du Preez, 2008)

4.9 When the Station pays

There is another situation that would apply only to *Carte Blanche* and that is when the station, as opposed to the program, pays for an interview. Journalists were told about the 60 Minutes interview with Michael Jackson, and the denial that they had paid for it, though it transpired that the station 60 Minutes broadcasts on, CBS, had. (Jeffries, 2007)

Debora Patta felt it was "pushing it" ethically, while Jacques Pauw called it "semantics...but is he going to say things that he wouldn't have said otherwise? I personally don't have a problem with that...I would have a problem paying a million dollars to Robert Mugabe for an interview. But Michael Jackson – he's an entertainer...I don't blame people paying for entertainment." (2008)

Carte Blanche is in a different position however. Without a local entertainment program on M-Net, "they would have no other place to advertise it [visiting celebrities] other than *Carte Blanche*". (G. Mazarakis, 2008) Mazarakis has said that in such a situation he would have a hard time saying no if directed by M-Net to interview the celebrity. He did say that if it was "specified that I couldn't ask him certain questions then I would have a problem with it because he's giving me an interview based on money that he's being paid in order to get across only what he wants to deal with. If that money was paid by the channel and we were given a no-holds barred interview, I think it would be slightly different." He does feel that the onus would be on *Carte Blanche* to reveal that the interview was paid for. "I've never considered it properly but one way around it would be to say: ' A: we were given this by M-Net because he's here for M-Net, and B: we have been given no restrictions'."

Such a scenario did occur twenty years ago. During *Carte Blanche*'s infancy M-Net was launching a series of James Bond films and had arranged a satellite interview

with the then-James Bond, Roger Moore. M-Net hosted Ursula Andress and Britt Eckland at a gala event, who then appeared in a live interview on the program. No mention was made of sponsorship.

In a similar vein, Lance Armstrong was in South Africa a few years ago sponsored by Tiger Brands. The condition of the interview was that he had to either be shot in front of a Tiger Brands advert, or the product had to be mentioned in the intro. (D. Watts, 2008)

Most journalists agreed that a payment is a payment, regardless of where it comes from. While one would have to be careful about the celebrities one inadvertently pays for, most people would acknowledge that celebrity interviews come with a price tag. Such issues are out of the realm of investigative journalism, however, where it is not part of normative practice to pay for interviews.

4.10 Intimated payments

Probably because of the program's demographics, people appearing on *Carte Blanche* can often find themselves the beneficiaries of largesse from viewers. It does sounds like a bribe: Subjects who are hesitant to appear on the program are persuaded by the potential generosity of viewers. It's never promised, but it is implied in phrases such as, 'we can't say for sure, but often when people appear on the program, the viewers respond in such and such a way...' These subjects are not being paid by the program, but often receive money and donations as a result of appearing on the program. It does happen on *Special Assignment* and *3rd Degree* occasionally, but not nearly to the same extent.

The fact of the matter is – it is true. Viewers have bought houses for *Carte Blanche* subjects; they've donated clothing, food, purchased medical equipment.

> "We once did a story on a housing scheme in a small town ... and these people were being evicted by unscrupulous lawyers for not meeting their payments and so on, but it was profoundly unjust ... I got a call from someone I know who is a very wealthy man who demanded anonymity, and he said 'how many houses are there at stake?' There was quite a number - more than 20 – and 'how much money is involved?' I told him and he said he would settle the bill of his own volition as a donation and he didn't want anyone to know that it was him, just because he was fantastically wealthy and he could." (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

"It all does get quite murky, doesn't it. Because you are selling it, although you couch it by saying 'sometimes'." (D. Lucas, 2008) "Is this chequebook journalism? I don't know." (R. Landman, 2008)

Not all endings are happy, however. *Carte Blanche* produced a story on Thoko Adonis, a woman who went around the townships with her wash tub to care for old people. After the broadcast she was inundated with goods and money from viewers, and Pick and Pay showered her with products. There was a lot of jealousy when she had her moment of fame and was the recipient of so much good will, and she was killed. The possibility of being enriched by appearing on television was not discussed with her but "it sort of makes you think twice, doesn't it, about saying that". (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

4.11 Paying in 3rd World Countries/Conflict Zones

There are specific matters that relate to geography; issues that raise themselves when shooting in third world countries and/or conflict zones. While interviewees spoke most often about shooting in west and central Africa, the difficulties encountered were no different than those seasoned journalists said they had faced in any other third world country, or in countries confronted by political instability or conflict. In such places there seems to be a different ethic, an altered consciousness about payment and money. It ranges from the missing page in the passport, to 'overweight luggage', outrageous accreditation costs, bribes to get over borders and

issues of access amongst others. Experiences seemed to vary somewhat, depending on the vantage point of the journalist concerned. While this paper concerns itself with the ethics of three South African actuality programs, it was necessary to explore the subject of geography and how it affects ethics from further afield to give the South African picture context.

As such, interviews were extended to journalists who have worked frequently in such areas; journalists who have been based in third world countries; those who are familiar with the occurrences in conflict zones. It was necessary to obtain their insights to understand the norm when working in such places, and to better comprehend the reported experiences of South African journalists.

Most of the nearly two dozen journalists interviewed for this paper feel that geography does make a difference in journalistic ethics. There is an awareness that certain practices they consider sacrosanct in South Africa may be compromised somewhat in third world countries.

Journalists who have been based in continental Africa are the most pragmatic about it. They realise when they need to pay for safety, accreditation or to get through a border post. They understand the corruption in certain countries and do their best to work ethically around it. Nick Kotch, formerly Reuter's African bureau chief, spoke of the discussions on ethics he would have with journalists around the continent; about how troubled some of them were with the status quo. (N. Kotch, personal communication, July 24, 2008)

In any event, there are real issues that have been raised by journalists working outside South Africa's borders.

4.11.1 Paying for Access

The journalists who are the least vulnerable to corruption are the ones working for agencies with a permanent or long-term presence in any given country, such as those involved with big organisations or networks like Reuters or CNN. South African journalists are probably most at risk.

A company such as Reuters has developed connections and contacts throughout the world who understand the terrain and the culture in which they are working. "We had a network of fixers underground all over the [African] continent. I had a bunch of guys in Kinshasa who would keep me informed and when I arrived they would automatically be part of my local team and that's a relationship that one builds up." (J. Matthews, personal communication, July 24, 2008) This 'network of fixers' work in close contact with bureau chiefs and would be sent on regular training courses.

Reuters also does not have a problem in being denied access to subjects and interviewees, or being denied interviews if they refuse to pay.

> "Working for Reuters, it's usually that people are actually quite keen to be interviewed by you, and if they're not keen but they know that they have to be interviewed, they are squeamish or careful before making demands... I think people are scared to ask for money from people at Reuters; I think they feel it might be used against them." (N. Kotch, 2008)

Big networks such as CNN likewise find that access is not a concern.

> "What many people don't understand is that networks like CNN or BBC are currency enough on their own. (T)hose names OPEN DOORS like you'd never believe it, and more so, in places like Nigeria, everyone wants to be on the BIG-NAME Network, so going down to the Niger Delta or deep in Nigeria's Northern Corridor is a lot simpler if you're with a Network that everyone recognises." (J. Koinange, personal communication, June 27, 2008)

However, it would appear that not all big communications companies develop their system of contacts and connections on the ground as Reuters has.

> "What would happen frequently, if you allow me to generalise, is that the American networks and CNN in particular, would arrive, couldn't be bothered to find their own people, so they would just offer to anyone who [could] speak reasonable English, seemed connected, you know, double, triple, five times more than you would have been paying local people, and then the next time when you try and employ these people they say 'no, but CNN, if I work for CNN they pay $50 a day'. "
> (J. Matthews, 2008)

There have been allegations from South African journalists that the foreign networks pay, yet there is no evidence of any other manner of payment than in terms of the preceding example.

However, there are certain claims levelled against South African journalists working in continental Africa; that they are naive, inexperienced, arrogant; that they pay for things they don't need to, such as access. "I get the feeling that a lot of South African journalists just don't know the terrain all too well, and sometimes they fall for an obvious fixer or whatever." (S. Woulters, 2008) "I think maybe some of the South African journalists who work only in the local media are not street-wise enough to be able to stand their ground in continental Africa." (C. Antonie, personal communication, July 21, 2008)

Nonetheless, it becomes apparent that the agencies and big foreign networks do not have to face the same ethical obstacles as local South African production houses. "I believe that probably I had it a bit easier ... I think if it's a smaller media house, it doesn't have that clout and then they may have more difficulty in getting access, therefore they may be more tempted to pay. " (N. Kotch, 2008)

"You don't pay people to say something you want them to say. You pay money for access...in Nigeria, you pay everywhere. The last time I was in Nigeria, I did a

documentary on Nollywood. At first we couldn't get access to a film set, simple as that, until we started to pay directors." (J. Pauw, 2008)

Teri Leppan produced a story on Nollywood years before Pauw did. She did not have to pay for access. However, another one of her stories was set in Kenya's Nairobi National Park, about a Masai rite of passage into manhood involving the ritual killing of lions. "To get those interviews … they've got an association and they wanted a donation to the association so I didn't pay a single person. But the donation gave me access..." (T. Leppan, personal communication, January 8, 2008)

But when the networks give out comparatively exorbitant daily rates for casual labour, it becomes that much more difficult for South African producers, with their limited budgets and lack of authority. "In Angola ... if you think that a medical doctor might make $100 US a month, and then suddenly CNN comes in and they pay drivers or fixers $50 a day, that's got nothing to do with South African journalists being naive or arrogant, it's the way that the American networks operate." (J. Matthews, 2008)

Access includes entree to places as well as to people. In conflict areas, there is often a struggle to get to the war zones. "We tried very hard to get to the frontline [of the Congo during recent fighting] for example, but we never could. We never went as far as to say, 'we'll give you a thousand bucks to fly us to the frontline'. There was only one group that got to the frontline and that was a very political link." (S. Woulters, 2008)

4.11.2 Paying fixers

Journalists who have worked for protracted periods in one country are critical of 'parachute journalists' who fly into an area without much knowledge of the history, geography or issues. They would be amongst the 'specials' who come into a country

a couple of times a year and hire ad hoc fixers, about whom they know little. (N. Kotch, 2008)

The lack of familiarity with a place or the people can leave a journalist susceptible to unethical fixers. "If you're the Boston Globe in Johannesburg and you're going to Zimbabwe for the first time, you're probably going to rely on a fixer/stringer who's hanging around that community of journalists and those ones can often be a bit – there's not much quality control there." (N. Kotch, 2008) A fixer can be a journalist's greatest asset or a very serious weakness. This is where journalists could unwittingly engage in unethical journalism if disreputable fixers undertake decisions on their behalf.

Experienced journalists choose fixers who regularly work as journalists for reputable companies. However, they are also hired help. "Sometimes reporting in conflict zones, the only person around who can give you a comment is your fixer and you can't use him .... He's just come up with something so amazing and you know it's the truth and you know that the source is great and he's prepared to tell it to you, but you can't do anything with it because you're paying for it, he's in your books." (C. Antonie, 2008) It is a frustration other journalists speak of, as utilising a fixer as a source is chequebook journalism.

Special Assignment regularly hired the services of Alex Stellianos, an undercover investigator/fixer who had assisted them with a number of investigative stories. In one particular story on tracking the route of the drug trade from Pakistan to South Africa, this man managed to infiltrate a drug cartel in Mozambique and uncovered the mechanics of how the operation actually worked. (Pauw, 2006) The story, as screened on television, pivoted around him. He became, in essence, the narrator of the investigation through a series of interviews with Jacques Pauw in which he spoke

of the findings of his investigations. The script did state that this man was their undercover investigator. (A. Burgess, 2008)

Pauw felt that such an unorthodox method of relating the story was justified as being in the public interest. The fixer's identity was not hidden, and *Special Assignment* was open in admitting that the fixer was a paid member of the team. Max du Preez watched the program as it went out on air. "I thought OK, this guy is getting paid to do this job. It was dangerous but I think he [Pauw] got away with it. A fixer – we all know what a fixer is – and often the fixer becomes the story and you've got to be very upfront that this man is in your employ." (M. du Preez, 2008)

This is another area in which South African journalists could be vulnerable. Unless they shoot regularly in the same country or region, they would not have developed relationships with other journalists and fixers.

> "I do think there's a very big disconnect between people who are coming in for a brief period and how they handle and perhaps have to handle the situation, and those who are very well versed in the local ways ... I've seen German crews do it, I've seen a lot of people do it – they go for the big story often and they don't have the time to sort of figure out, do they need to pay this guy or don't they need to pay this guy." (S. Woulters, 2008)

4.11.3 Paying for Passage

Big network or small production house, every single journalist interviewed who has worked in continental Africa speaks of handing out a few dollars, a carton of cigarettes or a bottle of whiskey to get through a road block or a border post. Whether they feel it's right, or proper, or think that geography should have no bearing on ethics, it's something everyone interviewed has had to do and it is put down to 'operational costs'.

> "We were travelling by land from Ghana to Cote d'Ivoire and it was my first such trip with the CNN crew and we got to the border and the guy said ... 'It's gonna take a long time, I've got to go in all those boxes,' and I said, 'well here's the car name, here's the list of everything we've got' and he said,

> 'no...not unless you're willing to pay' and I was very proper, 'on no, I'm not paying,' and one of the people in the crew who has spent more time in Africa than I have turned around and said, 'Pay – otherwise we will be here the entire night'." (C. Hunter-Gault, 2008)

It is a scenario described many times by journalists who regularly work in third world countries. Cecile Antonie sees it in terms of speeding up the process of news gathering.

> "You have a responsibility as a journalist to try and get to your story ... In terms of editorially putting the story on air, whether you paid that man at the border post $50 to let you go through, or given him that bottle of whiskey – I've got no problem giving a guy a bottle of whiskey to shut him up or a carton of cigarettes because I need to get to a story and someone is waiting to hear what is happening in the world." (C. Antonie, 2008)

She also sees it in terms of safety. "The first law – never argue with a man carrying a gun. We work in very hostile environments ... I don't look at it as a bribe – if I've got to pay an official $50 to make sure we have a relatively safe entrance through this passage – it's about safety for me."

Not everyone agrees that it's always necessary. "I think you can always talk to people...I'm not a Jesuit about it – I think if you have to do it, you have to do it...but I also think you can work on a bit of charm, you can shame people..." (N. Kotch, 2008)

Some journalists interviewed have had experience with 'area boys' who seem to be little more than gangs, terrorising TV crews and demanding money for shooting innocuous footage. There was some difference in opinion as to whether or not it was necessary to pay them off but most journalists felt it was safer and more expedient to do so.

4.11.4 Paying for accreditation

Equally corrupt, though seemingly more bureaucratic, are the costs for accreditation. At the time of the interview, Cecile Antonie was in the process for applying for press cards for the Congo. At $250 each, she had to pay the equivalent of R7,500 for her team of four. Jimi Matthews was in the Congo when Laurent Kabila came into power. "You'd be informed suddenly that you require new accreditation or that the accreditation had expired and the costs would be more."

Paying for accreditation is expensive, an annoyance, a bureaucratic bribe. But it also has no material bearing on the editorial.

Chapter 5

Findings: Focus Groups

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the findings of the focus groups according to themes that revealed themselves during the course of discussion. As outlined more extensively in chapter 3, there were four viewer focus groups conducted, divided into gender and upper and lower Living Standards Measure (LSM). In South Africa the LSM calculations are determined solely on what material possessions one has acquired. Many people at the lower LSM level do not have a television, although they have watched, or were at least aware of, *Special Assignment* and *3rd Degree. Carte Blanche* was generally an unknown entity for a lot of the 6-7 LSM group members. Therefore the discussions were based more on general ideas, rather than specific impressions of the programs. It was interesting to note that that while the *YOU* magazine story about the alleged confession of Donovan Moodley did not seem to be commonly known, the *Special Assignment* story about the Grootvlei prison tapes was.

The 6-7 LSM focus groups were conducted at Lifestyle Nurseries north of Johannesburg by convenience sampling. It was an excellent place to conduct such a survey as there are many people in various levels of employment. Management at Lifestyle did the headhunting based on specifications such as income and racial and job diversity, and were able to offer several bright and intelligent employees for the discussions.

The male and female 9-10 LSM groups were held in a house in Johannesburg and participants were chosen for similar reasons, as well as being fairly forthcoming in their opinions. All were aware of the three programs under discussion with some being frequent viewers of at least one of them.

5.2 Challenges

There were distinct challenges, particularly with the lower LSM groups. Language was a bit of a barrier, as of the 7 participants in each of the 6-7 LSM groups, only a total of four people spoke English as their first language. It is also somewhat problematic to convey sophisticated concepts to people in their second or third language, specifically about issues they had never contemplated. There was, at times, a sense that they did not understand the questions completely, and appropriate answers were not always given. It was also difficult for some of them to convey their thoughts as they frequently did not have the vocabulary to do so.

Another challenge was constructing a line of questioning that would be appropriate to all four groups: The questions are detailed fully in Appendix 1, as well as a summary thereof in chapter 3. Appendix 2 outlines the flow of discussion amongst each group.

There was a time factor for the lower LSM groups as their employer could only consent to one hour per group. Three of the seven participants in the female 6-7 LSM group were not very participative. They seemed intimidated, and never settled into the process. There was one notable individual; a tea lady named Hazel who understood inherently what the issues were and why they were important.

The male 6-7 LSM group started slowly but became quite animated and interested.

The upper male and female groups were dynamic. Again, some of the concepts under discussion had never been considered. One of the upper LSM women was sick when the focus group was held and e-mailed her answers in later. They have been included as if she had attended the group.

There were a number of themes that developed during discussions with respect to payment for stories and videotape, regardless of gender and living standards measure.

5.3 Tainted Information vs. News as a Commodity

In each group, two camps immediately developed: Those who felt that paying for a story contaminates the information acquired; and those who saw information as a commodity.

With the exception of the upper LSM women, people concerned that paying for a story was likely to result in exaggerated, manipulated or even fabricated information appeared to be in the minority in each group. However it was difficult to ascertain if this was indeed the truth as many of the upper LSM men masked their disenchantment with the media under a thick layer of cynicism.

The issue of information being corrupted was raised at the beginning of each discussion. However, by the end of the conversation only one or two people in each group persisted with that particular argument. The others had abandoned it in favour of the news as commodity debate.

Only the higher LSM women's group held a majority view that information should not be paid for. One of the women was unyielding although after much discussion she finally rationalised that if payment is made "in pursuit of a crime or a law that's being broken or something illegal that's been happening," then it can be justified. (Sandy) Many others who were initially concerned seemed to soften their position, with pragmatic comments such as "if nobody else got the story, then I say go for it" (Mary); "if it means they expose somebody for the rot that they are and they have to pay somebody to get that exposed, well then, so be it". (Jackie)

Yannis was the sole member of the higher male LSM group who resolutely stood his ground. “I think you’re introducing a bias into the information that you’ll get on the basis of the reward that you’re going to give ... If you stand on that slippery slope you’ll always find reasons why you pay ... this begins to snowball and becomes an established practice ... then an established norm.”

Michael, one of only two members of the male LSM 6-7 group who worried about potential prejudice in paying for information, was also offended that criminals were “getting rich on it”.

In the lower female LSM group the minority spoke vociferously about corrupting data by paying for it. “If they paid, then he can lie because he wanted some money”, (Hazel) and “I think it’s becoming just like America, you know paparazzi, they pay for whatever they want. They get it, they don’t care whether it’s true or not, they just get any kind of information.” (Nadine)

Although viewers almost unanimously believed that *Special Assignment* was correct to screen the Grootvlei footage, the upper LSM groups thought less of the program when they discovered that it had been paid for. The women stated that they felt it was less credible, while the men raised the point that “*Carte Blanche* maybe has more integrity than *Special Assignment*”. (Donald) The lower LSM groups felt that *Special Assignment* had lost no credibility, and in fact the men thought more of the program as a result of the discussion.

Only one person per group spoke of the possibility that justice would be perverted in the case of *YOU* magazine paying Donovan Moodley’s cellmate for information. It did not seem to be of primary relevance to the other 85% of focus group members. This may be due to inadequate comprehension of the significance of the legal process being corrupted. Nonetheless, thinking was more focussed on recognising the gap in the commercial market than the legal ramifications.

Although the 'news as a commodity' view resonated most with the men, each group couched it very differently.

Two distinct arguments arose in the debate about news as a commodity, generally divided along LSM lines.

The majority view of the lower LSM groups was that it is essential to pay for stories. Their argument had nothing to do with integrity or principles, nor were they cynical. Five of the seven lower LSM men spoke about the need to pay; that without the promise of payment one could not possibly get information. "No money, no story," one of the men succinctly summed up. (Golden) Ivy, who appeared to speak on behalf of three other women, also felt that information would not be freely available unless payment was forthcoming, and in response to the two scenarios outlined to the group, said "they were supposed to pay to get that story".

They also felt that in paying for information in investigative journalism the media was assisting the police, or doing the work the police should have done.

There was another interesting aspect to this viewpoint. Rather than distorting the truth of the information by paying for it, they felt that it is necessary to pay for truth. "When money's involved, you'll always be true." (Person) All five members of the male group who supported this philosophy offered evidence with various anecdotes and hypothetical situations. When asked if they were not concerned that information would be withheld in the hopes of a second payment, the response was one of indignation. "You cannot pay someone fully and get a half story." (Timon)

Only one person supported this view in the upper LSM groups. "The journalist would make sure that there is something that is going to attract me or there's something that's going to make me divulge information to him." (Mandisa)

Otherwise the upper LSM groups generally saw the issue cynically, as indicated in comments such as, “obviously in an ideal world money shouldn’t be paid for the truth”. (Gareth) These kinds of remarks indicate displeasure with the status quo, so while there was an apparent resigned acceptance of the situation in these groups, it is not because they believe it is correct.

They all agreed that it was a “foregone conclusion” that *YOU* magazine would have paid, and that payment was not restricted to the tabloid press. “I think it’s generally accepted that readers know that stories are paid for, period.” (Gary) Gary also thought that, despite being a quality newspaper, the Mail & Guardian nonetheless paid for its stories. “No one’s going to venture any information, in a lot of cases, for nothing.” (Wendy) “I think it’s common knowledge that most magazines do pay for their stories.” (Jackie)

In terms of television, “I just feel that ... especially Carte Blanche, they probably don’t have to pay much at all, they just threaten to expose you and then you’re very keen to come on and give your point of view!” (Wendy) One man perceived *Carte Blanche* profiles as “basically a promo for that individual, it’s a form of payment if you like”. (John)

The upper LSM groups are possibly more media savvy, or consume more media generally, as they were conscious of ways in which the media pays “in kind”, from promoting a visiting celebrity to producing a story about a needy recipient, and the quid pro quo that goes along with appearing on national television. “I don’t think it’s necessarily always a hard cash deal. I mean if somebody’s interviewed about their business it’s damned good publicity for their business, so there’s a financial understanding though it’s not a payment.” (Wendy) Such concepts were not developed in the lower LSM groups.

They generally all felt that television almost definitely paid for stories. "For the good stories, they will go to all lengths, they will pay." (Mandisa) When they discovered that was not the case, they were surprised to hear how seriously the television current affairs programs under discussion consider ethics in decision making.

The reaction upon learning that *Special Assignment* had purchased videotape from prisoners that *Carte Blanche*, citing ethical reasons, had turned down was to consider the market opportunities.

> "I'm quite interested that *Carte Blanche* never buys stories. I didn't know that, which tells me it's bad business practice. They should put that point out very strongly as often as they can, which is saying that other people do pay. That's really the only edge you have in the marketplace is the moral edge. Then you know when you watch *Carte Blanche* you're never watching a bought story, just as we know when we read *YOU* magazine, we're almost always reading a bought story." (John)

Special Assignment's rationalisation of how they arrived at the payment amount (by calculating the length of the purchased tape times the rate per minute) was scoffed at. "They're running a business. They pay what they think the story is worth. It's a margin, a profit/loss situation." (John)

John also felt that such discussions are something of a luxury in the limited world of South African journalism. "You can afford to have an ethical debate about it in the current environment which sounds like a very sheltered environment but when the reality in the environment changes and it becomes more competitive the same peoples' ethics will shift or they'll have to leave the marketplace and that's a reality, isn't it."

Only the upper LSM female group seemed initially to have problems in accepting the concept of an exchange of information being a business. As the conversation

progressed more of the group members acknowledged that the news industry works like any other.

Members of the male group who objected were nonetheless aware of the business of selling media products. "A journalist's job is to sell newspapers so obviously they [*YOU* magazine] would publish it [Moodley's confession] if there is a benefit from that." (Garth)

5.4 Paying for Time/Risk/Service

The issue of paying for time was raised spontaneously by a member of the 9-10 LSM female group. "If somebody's interviewing Mary on her job...they're taking her time. If you're a consultant ... you're going to bill for your time... so what makes it different from a journalist interviewing somebody else to gather information and that journalist not paying?" (Jackie)

The 9-10 LSM male group concentrated on paying people for the danger involved in getting a story. "Those prisoners who did that videotaping were taking a significant risk." (Gareth) One person compared it to the movie "The Insider" about Jeffrey Wigand, a former highly placed employee in the tobacco industry whose life was destroyed by going public about the industry's knowledge of the addictive qualities of cigarettes and the real dangers of smoking.

> "What was the real benefit for him and yes you can take the moral high ground and say from the moral point of view he was a winner. In today's world let's be real, what does that mean? So you have someone sacrificing themselves for what we understand is the truth and what are they getting out of it? Do I go to the trouble, or should I find somewhere else where there's some meaningful benefit and 90% of the time, meaningful benefit is money." (Gary)

Several of the male 9-10 LSM group members felt that payment was vital to encourage people to step forward with knowledge about corruption. Further, they

were of the opinion that money should be made available for whistle blowers as one could not expect that kind of imbedded information to surface without the promise of adequate compensation and protection. Although they were aware that it should be the government's responsibility, it was felt that the government itself was the problem and journalists needed to step into the breach.

Three people in the male 6-7 and female 9-10 LSM groups spoke of paying the prisoners, not for the information, but for the service rendered. "I would imagine it to be common knowledge that they would have to buy that video coverage from someone." (Jackie)

5.5 Chequebook Journalism and the Public Interest

With one exception only, all 26 focus groups members felt that *Special Assignment* was correct in screening the footage from Grootvlei Prison. Several people in the focus groups, directly or indirectly, spoke about the public interest as an extenuating circumstance in the consideration of paying not only for videotape but for information, and many drew a distinction in those terms between the story *YOU* magazine had paid for, and the *Special Assignment* prison tapes.

Nadine, Teoni and Hazel were the three LSM 6-7 women who defended their belief that paying for stories taints the information gathered, but were satisfied to make allowances for the prisons tapes. "I think it helps the government to see that the crimes go on and on in South Africa and if those cameras were not there, I think they would say, those prisoners are safe where they are, South Africa is fine." (Hazel)

One member of the male 6-7 LSM group had an interesting observation. "I think the law works only if the public knows, that way it can work 100%. If the public knows then the law works. They must understand." (Timon)

There was a notable interaction in the female 9-10 group. While everyone agreed that the *Special Assignment* tapes were in the public interest and therefore had to be seen, there was some contention as to whether or not the *YOU* magazine story was in the public interest. "Why is it in the public interest? The man is going to face trial; he is going to go through due process anyway. Theoretically the truth will be revealed in court, so why is it in the public interest what his cell mate said?" (Sandy)

However, Mandisa felt that the fact that an Indian man had perpetrated the crime was in the public interest. "It was something that was very very very rare, that the crime was also getting into the Indian community. So I think that it was for me, personally, in the public interest to understand because you always have these two sides, with the white ones and the African ones and then now to say 'how does this happen?'"

Mandisa was also the lone voice in this group in saying that if she had information she would "not give it out for free". She also spoke frequently about the authenticity of the information being the most salient point, not whether or not it had been paid for. However, for good information there must be an exchange of money. "We cannot be choosy about how we bring the news. If we have to get the news, we have to get the news and bring it to the public."

Greg, from the male LSM 9-10 group, had a similar viewpoint, feeling that it is more important that we get some truth, albeit tainted, than none at all. He bridled at what he considered censorship of a sort. He felt that journalists should pay for the story, reveal the fact of payment and let the reader beware. "Payment for me - whether that person is being paid and they're exaggerating the story or leaving parts of the truth out – I would rather parts of the truth come out so I can go discover for myself what the actual truth is from various media than not have any of that

revealed." However, in journalistic theory, this is a negation of journalism as a profession; of journalists making professional judgements.

Concerns about truth and the public interest were also verbalised in terms of how they affect the consumer. "We as taxpayers are paying money so these prisons can operate and to lock these people away who committed crimes and if these kinds of things are going on ... is it ethical, they paid for it? But they're getting the truth out there." (Donald, male LSM 9-10)

While the concept of the public interest was understood better in some groups than in others, it would appear that these viewers agree that stories undertaken in the public interest are given more liberty in production methods than those produced for sensational purposes.

5.6 Paying for Videotape vs. Paying for a Story

Approximately half the participants deemed there was no material difference between the purchase of a story, and paying for videotape. It is a distinction that has no equivalent in the press. In television journalism ethics there is quite a significant line drawn between purchasing videotape and information. It is interesting that so many group members believed there was none, despite discussions of both. It would indicate that perhaps audiences do not draw the fine line that journalists do when it comes to morality.

Some of the female 6-7 LSM group felt that paying for videotape was a different matter to paying for a story. "On videotape you can see what the truth is, it's evidence." (Nadine) This was the position about half the group held, saying that television is more trustworthy than the print media for exactly that reason.

However others in the group took a very different stand. Their point was that documented evidence exists for all to see, but stories that go unrewarded may

never be expressed. "It's better to pay someone to tell you their story ... because if you don't pay where are you going to find that information?" (Eliza)

Only a slight majority, four of the seven members of the male 6-7 LSM group felt that paying for videotape was more justified than paying for a story. "It was footage, it wasn't a story told from one person to another." (Michael)

There was a slightly less trusting attitude in the female 9-10 LSM group, articulated several times. "TV documentary evidence can be as contrived as any kind of print can be; who's to know whether that's authentic or not or hasn't been edited to suit the story completely." (Wendy) Kaysaree felt that if journalists worked hard enough, there was likely no need to ever have to pay for anything. She was not present during the discussions, however. Her views were never tempered by the give and take of the group.

Both male and female upper LSM groups expressed concern as much with the integrity of the story source, as the fact of paying for the *YOU* story. "What the hell are they doing interviewing a cell mate? He's in jail!" (Donald)

The upper LSM groups recognised the difference in quality between *YOU* magazine and *Special Assignment.* There was reference to various brands with an implicit understanding of where they stood on the integrity scale. No such mention was made in the lower LSM groups.

5.7 Disclosure of Payment

Three of the four groups unanimously felt that should a story or videotape be purchased, it must be disclosed to the audience in the interests of honesty and transparency. Two LSM 9-10 men felt that disclaimers were necessary, as occurs in published findings in medical journals. "At the end of the article it should say 'the interviewee was paid a sum of money.'" (Yannis) One member of the group even

mentioned that he thought it should be made law. Sandy, a member of the female 9-10 group thought that the admission of paying for the videotape in the prisons story would have made the story "more honest and honourable," and Hazel, from the 6-7 group was adamant that not only should the fact be revealed to us, but "they need also to tell us the reason why they paid for that information".

Interestingly the sentiment in the male 6-7 group was also unanimous, but they felt that payment should not be revealed to the viewers. "As long as it's proven, I don't care how they get it [the information]."(Michael) It was also felt that if they were open about it, they would create a market for stories. "Everyone's thinking OK, they'll get paid the next week." (Garth) There was also the rather naive idea that if it was not mentioned, no one would know.

5.8 Paying for passage in third world countries

When time allowed, some of the groups were asked whether they felt that paying for passage in third world countries was ethically correct. Not one person had any real objection to it, speaking of "local morality" and that it didn't have any material consequence to the ethics of the journalism. "It doesn't affect the validity of the story and it doesn't necessarily in any way affect the bias of the journalist." (Sandy)

Chapter 6

Analysis of Findings

6.1 Introduction

Findings of interviews with journalists, as well as the findings that came out of discussions with focus groups have been addressed in chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Chapter 6 will deal with the analysis of the findings of both. In order to do so comprehensively, some similar ground will be dealt with when topics covered in chapters 4 and 5 require more discussion.

6.2 Paying for Stories

All three executive producers speak of being approached often by people who want outrageous sums for their stories, which leads one to believe that there is a perception amongst the public that television does pay, and pays well. This was borne out by attitudes of viewers in the focus groups who were of the opinion that even the quality media pays for stories. The cynicism expressed in the upper LSM groups would indicate that they felt that paying for stories was not ideal. Their acceptance of the fact was not necessarily condoning it; they simply regarded the duplicity of the media as inevitable in today's world where it was suggested that the real business of journalism is to sell products.

However, contrary to public perception, research undertaken for this paper has found that there were only two reported incidents of chequebook journalism amongst the three selected current affairs programs, both of which were at *Carte Blanche*. The problem does not appear to be a lack of ethical guidance at *Carte Blanche*, but rather lack of clear communication about the issue outside South African borders. This meant that the decision to pay for the interviews was taken by the producer alone, who believed that what she was doing was in accordance with program parameters, rather than in consultation with the executive producer.

Media ethicist Louis Day (2003:214) speaks of chequebook journalism potentially corrupting the truth in that "paid interviewees may feel financially obligated to perform or produce something of journalistic interest..." The very act of filming the gangs on the university campus in Nigeria could have distorted the truth in some way. With the cameras on them and the promise of promoting their views they could possibly have put on a show. The added inducement of payment may have further provoked these criminals to stage a performance.

Before one opposes the method Leppan utilised to produce the two West African stories on the grounds of her social responsibility as a journalist to be truthful, accurate and emphasise neutrality and objectivity, there is one important consideration. South Africa's press code states that the only justification for departing from the "highest standards of journalism" is when the public interest is at stake. As discussed in chapter 2, the public interest is defined as, among other things:

> "(D)etecting or exposing crime or serious misdemeanor; detecting or exposing serious anti-social conduct; protecting public health or safety; preventing the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organization; detecting or exposing hypocrisy, falsehoods or double standards of behaviour on the part of public figures or institutions or in public institutions." (Press Code of Professional Practice, 2006)

There is another point to reflect on: It may be that *Carte Blanche* is more vulnerable to incidents of chequebook journalism because of the freelance nature of its relationship with its producers. Both *Special Assignment* and *3rd Degree* have full-time staff; they are paid regardless of whether their stories get aired or not. However, while there is a core group of *Carte Blanche* producers, they are hired on a contract basis for each story. "You've got the freelance producers ... having to produce at a particular rate to make money and a degree of greed gets in the way which sometimes makes them push forward a story which isn't really a good story but they carry on with it until it goes out on air because they don't want to lose out

on the money." (G. Mazarakis, personal communication, July 22, 2008) The system has the potential to jeopardise the integrity of the program.

The notion that paying for stories taints the information is the primary reason journalists and media academics object to it. While a high minority of focus group members agreed with this view, most of them, particularly the lower LSM groups, did not share those concerns.

It is interesting to note that of the twelve black members of all the focus groups, most of whom were in the lower LSM assemblage, eleven of them strongly feel that news is a commodity that must be paid for. They believe it is absolutely correct that journalists should need to financially negotiate to obtain information. What is also fascinating is the consensus that only in paying for a story can one reach the truth; that rather than distorting the veracity of the information by paying for it, the truth will only be revealed when there is a fee attached.

The sole objector was a woman who also appeared to be the least cynical. One can only speculate as to why this would be. Perhaps her relative lack of knowledge about journalism coupled with her appreciation for it due to her rural roots gave her this distinct perspective.

While it is impossible to draw conclusions from this limited sample, there does seem to be a more commercial attitude, as well as a sense that the exchange of money authenticates the information, which should come with a price tag. It was not perceived as a corruption of the news gathering process; indeed, there was no sense that morality was at stake in any way.

6.3 Paying for videotape

The transmission of the two separate purchases of videotape that caused controversy amongst the media and the public was the footage of the police dogs

mauling the Mozambican man, and the video recording taken inside Grootvlei Prison by a couple of the prisoners. *Carte Blanche* turned down the police dogs video, and *3rd Degree* and *Carte Blanche* both chose not to broadcast the tapes from inside prison.

The fact that the seller was hoping to prompt a bidding war to drive up the price of the product adds a somewhat unsavoury element to the incident. Information that was significantly in the public interest was being traded as a commodity. In the end, only the SABC bid on it and only *Special Assignment* televised it. It was appropriate that is was aired on the public broadcaster with its mandate to transmit information that is in the public interest. The SABC, acting in a socially responsible manner, needed to screen the material in the interests of the public sphere as well as the public interest. (McQuail 1987:116)

There is another factor in deciding whether or not to buy such footage, however. Is there not an issue of morality in privately screening the tape as an executive producer and electing not to broadcast it, for it is possible that the information would not become part of the public sphere and thus no action could be taken against the offenders? George Mazarakis felt that either someone would have bought it, or eventually it would have been given freely. Jacques Pauw felt differently. “Somebody would pay for it. He could have sold it probably for a much higher amount of money to the BBC ... I think that Panorama would pay for it.” (J. Pauw, personal communication, April 8, 2008)

Had it been screened exclusively on a foreign network, it would have been available only to those with DStv, and not to the nation as a whole. It likely would have come and gone on select screens without the local press picking up on it. The material would have been inaccessible to the general populace, and the free flow of information would have been impeded. (Oosthuizen, 2002:3) While one could

argue that M-Net and thus *Carte Blanche* is broadcast to a privileged few, *Carte Blanche* is an agenda setter. Had it been aired on *Carte Blanche* it would have become a conversation point on radio talk shows and in newspapers, and from there action would have ensued.

There was general consensus among journalists that buying videotape is not in the same league as buying a story; that videotape is documentary evidence while a story could easily be fabricated. Audience members did not draw the distinction, generally, or felt that one could be as easily manipulated as the other. Some journalists felt that the payment was justified, not only for the physical material purchased, but for the risk involved for the people shooting the tape. This point was mentioned several times during the focus groups, where there was also mention of a service being rendered.

One of the women felt that *Special Assignment* had behaved in an unethical and unlawful manner towards an "unsuspecting public that are being misled – all in the name of capitalism" by screening the prisons videotape. (Kaysaree) There seemed to be a disconnect, generally, but particularly in the female 9-10 LSM group, about what good journalism is. It was said that journalists let "nothing stand in the way of a good story" (Wendy) which some perceived as being "extremely unethical" in and of itself. Kieran's thoughts about good journalism are brought to mind as he felt that it "perhaps requires certain clinical detachment from and disregard for some of the ethical niceties and sensitivities of everyday ethical life". (Kieran, 1997:3)

A very interesting point is that there appeared to be two camps amongst the producers: Those who feel that ethics must be upheld regardless, as supported by George Mazarakis; and those who believe that the public interest excuses a certain amount of ethical rigidity, verbalised by Jacques Pauw and Max du Preez. It is actually a difference in philosophical approaches, with Mazarakis espousing a deontological slant while the *Special Assignment* creators believe in a teleological

attitude towards journalism. South Africa's press code, with its clause that excuses noncompliance if a story is in the public interest, would support the latter. Kieran (1997:73) also states that when there are no other means of "investigating a matter than a journalist has good grounds to believe is one of great public interest, then such typically dubious means are justifiable."

However, the difference in viewpoint may also be due to the directive of each program. *Special Assignment* is solely an investigative program with a strong public interest mandate, whereas *Carte Blanche* is a magazine program with elements of investigative journalism.

The public interest was a concept that did seem to be understood in the focus groups, with the audiences in agreement that such stories should be given more ethical flexibility than stories that are not in the public interest. They nonetheless felt that that some sort of a social contract had been broken. This would likely have been avoided had they been told about the method used, and why it was unavoidable in the circumstances.

6.4 Second-hand/Intimated payments

Focus group members were not asked about the issue of second-hand payments. Indeed, the idea of second-hand payments as an extension of chequebook journalism is not one that has been considered often in academic books and journals. The only remotely similar situation described is when Larry Flynt placed an ad in the Washington Post, promising $1m US to anyone who could prove that a high-ranking government official had had an adulterous affair. Before long a political career was cut short, and the mainstream press picked up on the story. (Heyboer, 1999) While they had not paid for the story, it was too good to ignore.

In easing discussions between a source wanting payment and a member of the print media who is willing to pay, Mazarakis has been able to obtain stories for free.

Technically he is not paying for the story. Former CNN journalist Bernard Kalb says that this is not necessarily bad journalism. "You've got to do the usual legwork on the story," (Kalb as cited in Heyboer, 1999) which *Carte Blanche* does when acquiring such stories. "Am I indulging in chequebook journalism by getting someone else to pay for the story?... I felt that I wasn't paying – it was important to me not to pay" (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

Media ethicist Bob Steele contends that the public will "discount the value of information" when it is "tainted by financial motives". (as cited in Heyboer, 1999) Would that still be the case with a second-hand payment, because "(o)nce someone goes public with information that was bought and paid for, don't many news organisations simply pick it up?" (Heyboer, 1999)

With regard to the intimation of payment by producers and presenters at *Carte Blanche,* it is debatable as to whether or not it is chequebook journalism. As in discussions around second-hand payments, there is an arm's length and strictly speaking no payment is forthcoming from the program. However, participants, with the expectation of pending rewards may be tempted to play up their roles and exhibit more emotion. The return for being on such a program with its hundreds of thousands of affluent viewers would be far greater than simply being paid to be on the program, and some participants' lives have been changed tremendously after being on *Carte Blanche*. Some added sentiment, passion, or a tear or two, could make a big difference in reaching the audience emotionally.

While on the face of it, intimating that rewards may be imminent would seem to be an innocuous enough practice, it does have the real potential to produce stories that may be exaggerated or manipulated in some way.

6.5 Paying Consultants

This can be an ethical minefield. "You have to be careful you are not paying for what you want them to tell you….If you're loose with the term, it's easy for the `consultant' to be a paid informant." (Houston as cited in Heyboer, 1999) While a number of experts view payment only in terms of compensation for time lost, would there not be an inclination among some to buy, not only an opinion, but a specific opinion that would support their story?

Another concern about the morality of paying consultants is that it is also "easy for a source to be a 'consultant'". (Selcraig, 1994)

It would appear that normative values in this regard differ tremendously from one country to another. In America it is the custom to pay consultants, as also appears to be the situation in England and Greece. However, with regards to *3rd Degree*'s experience of shooting the story in England on Madeline McCann, the child who disappeared on a family holiday, it does seem inconceivable that a public servant such as the policeman interviewed by Patta should demand payment.

While sources such as the academic or the royal watcher clearly make a living from delivering expert opinion, it is unheard of in South Africa to pay a civil servant for information. It is nothing more than elevating ordinary sources into consultants, and then paying them for their input. The attendant publicity is considered payment enough in the local media, although international sources would derive no benefit from that.

However the viewers saw the situation differently, with a more mercenary attitude. Where principled journalists believe that the integrity of the source is critical, the audience appeared to see this attitude as somewhat too convenient. All groups who spoke of it felt that time must be paid for when seeking expert opinion. It seemed

that viewers regard journalistic morals as somewhat sanctimonious in this situation, especially as they perceive it to be of benefit only to the journalist.

6.6 Working in Conflict Zones/Third World Countries

It has been discussed how journalists working on the South African programs in question are at a distinct disadvantage when producing outside the country's borders. However, beyond problems of access and having no infrastructure to speak of, it would appear that all journalists who work in these countries come up against the same issues.

In fact, there are other predicaments that big networks and organisations may have to face that don't affect individual South African programs. With the "big names" may come the expectation of bigger bribes to get across borders, and higher accreditation fees, for example.

It would appear that most journalists, both local and foreign, see such issues in terms of safety and expediency when deciding how to deal with them. Paying for passage is a fact of life when shooting in a third world country or conflict zone. It is not ethical, but there seems to be no way of getting around it. This type of payment does not appear to have any material effect on editorial content, whereas not paying can jeopardise the production.

Members of the focus groups were also unanimous on this point. Not one person had any real objection to it, with the general sentiment that it was not of substantial consequence to the ethics of journalism. In this instance journalists and audiences were of the same mind.

However, Teri Leppan feels that we cannot judge third world countries by Western standards. "We see paying someone for a story as an ethical thing. In certain parts of Africa people just expect to be paid. It's a courtesy, it's respect…They just don't

see it in terms of journalism and ethics and being paid for a story…very often it would be part of a cultural thing." (T. Leppan, personal communication, January 8, 2008) Her opinion is in line with the lower LSM focus groups' thinking. Charlayne Hunter-Gault simply does not tolerate this view.

> "I mean it's cultural, but it's cultural graft and corruption…I don't accept this cultural excuse. I find that an excuse and a rationalization…Those journalists in Zimbabwe are having such a hard time but they're not compromising their principles and their ethics, even those who no longer have a medium to work in, so if they can do it, any one of them can do it." (C. Hunter-Gault, personal communication, July 16, 2008)

There are several other matters that arose from the interviews that beg discussion with particular reference to the three actuality programs; *Carte Blanche*, *Special Assignment* and *3rd Degree*.

6.7 Competition

As previously discussed, it would appear that competition for audiences and thus advertisers is one of the primary drivers behind chequebook journalism in other countries, particularly America, the United Kingdom and Australia.

While there is some element of competition between the three South African television actuality programs, one cannot be compared with the other. Debora Patta has accepted that *3rd Degree* is a niche market on their station, "we're never going to get the ratings that WW wrestling does" (D. Patta, personal communication, June 26, 2008) and by her own admission says that they sometimes have "shocking" ratings. *Special Assignment* is transmitted on the public broadcaster and has a far greater reach than the other two programs. *Carte Blanche* is on M-Net, and while it is "#1 on the DStv platform" (G. Mazarakis, 2008), it cannot begin to compare with the audience *Special Assignment* has access to.

There is a class system of sorts within the programs investigated. *Carte Blanche*, with the machine of MultiChoice and ultimately NasPers backing them, is not strapped for finances even though their budgets may be limited. Should they wish to purchase a piece of videotape and could motivate for it, the resources are there. *Special Assignment* has the state coffers behind them but *3rd Degree* operates in a different category altogether. The budgets are minuscule which impacts on the amount of travel they can do, for example, and it is unlikely that they would be in a position to outbid the other two programs for videotape.

While each program is aware of what the others have done, sometimes wishing they had been able to get a story first, with the exception of award time the competition appears to be primarily internal. For *Special Assignment* the battle has always been for survival, "to not give the SABC a reason to close us down". (A. Burgess, personal communication, April 23, 2008) Each program has their own style "almost as if there's an unspoken agreement between all of us that while we're competing for the same stories, there's an agreement that we do them differently". (G. Mazarakis, 2008) And despite pressure to come up with good stories each week, *3rd Degree* and *Carte Blanche* speak of favourable support from management.

But should there be more players in the field, more competition for the same stories, each executive producer is aware that there is a possibility that journalism will change. As an example, Patta reports that a domestic 24 hour news channel in the States has had to amend the way they gather news. "They've been forced to do things that they would never normally have done before, like drop the two source verification of a story," as well as running human interest stories ad nauseum. (D. Patta, 2008) The need to fill airtime, as well as the pressures of time and the ubiquitous competition have had an impact on their operational procedures, resulting in poorer news quality. "Another player on the market does make things a little bit tighter and one just hopes that people can employ ethical journalists,

because at the end of the day one has to look at long term credibility." (D. Patta, 2008) However she does not think the competition will ever be as ferocious as in America as the market cannot support it. "People just don't have the money."

Mazarakis feels that should there be more competition in the industry, as it appears there will be, one unethical program could potentially start a trend of paying for stories.

> "If they were to begin a chequebook approach, just because they think that this is going to get them a head start - which they probably need because they need to draw an audience away from the established operators – they could damage the integrity of television journalism irreparably. And then we will all be put into a position that we will almost be forced into it." (G. Mazarakis, 2008)

While Pauw (2008) thinks that chequebook journalism is prompted by "enormous competition" he does not feel that South African journalism will be compromised in the same way. "Newspapers and broadcasters are not wealthy enough; they're not rich enough to do it. And I don't think we've reached that culture yet."

It is quite disappointing to discover that amongst the lower LSM groups, there does not even appear to be much of a distinction between quality and tabloid journalism, let alone any idea of competition or differences between the three programs. A comment was made that *Carte Blanche* and *Special Assignment* were "all pretty much like *3rd Degree*". Some of the upper LSM women mentioned *Carte Blanche* as being a favourite due to the emotional connection of having a presenter-driven program, and spoke about seeing Debora Patta at the gym. The lower LSM groups were enamoured of Patta, admiring her chutzpah. The upper LSM men spoke about the programs collectively, about investigative television and the need for whistleblowers without singling any one program out. Interestingly no one group or person spoke of *Special Assignment* without being prompted.

6.8 A Market Approach

Despite the fact that competition, at this point, does not drive chequebook journalism in South Africa, that does not mean that the executive producers do not have to be concerned about the bottom line. They know who their audiences are, and what they need to do to stay on air. All three executive producers are conscious of what programs get them viewers, and which ones do not. They realise there is a need to balance the reality of the marketplace with the public interest.

Carte Blanche and Special *Assignment* are cognisant that they remain on air because of their ratings. "I do think money is the bottom line...you know, we stopped doing a whole bunch of AIDS stories. Certainly last year they said they don't want AIDS stories – they're not getting us viewers." (D. Lucas, personal communication, March 10, 2008)

Jacques Pauw concurs. "When you do the worthy stories, you know the AIDS stories; the massacres in the Congo kind of stories, the ratings tend to fall. There's nothing like perking it up with a good piece of sensationalism." (J. Pauw, 2008)

3rd Degree has likewise found that the stories about crime and prostitution are best received by viewers. "Politics never does well. Anything international never does well. Anything social justice, kind of for the poor never does well." (D. Patta, 2008)

Stories about AIDS, inequities, societal problems are certainly in the public interest. These are the stories journalists want to do but the executive producers know their ratings suffer as a result. In the business of television, one can never be oblivious to audiences and hence ratings.

While e-tv supports *3rd Degree* in spite of the sometimes very poor ratings, it may be because the program does attract advertisers. "I think from an advertising point of

view, we don't get the huge numbers of viewers, but we get the advertisers because people want to be associated with the credibility and integrity." (D. Patta, 2008)

Conversely, a newspaper such as *Vrye Weekblad* could not have survived had it depended on advertisers. "We owned ourselves; we never had an owner outside the journalists themselves so there was never a commercial interest." (M. du Preez, July 25, 2008) They had the freedom to publish what they wanted only because they were not profit driven.

There is another aspect of the marketplace about which *Carte Blanche* executive producer George Mazarakis, particularly, needs to be sensitive. During discussions he revealed that he has had affidavits in his safe; signed statements regarding the corruption of Jackie Selebi. Mazarakis knew before the fact that Selebi would be arrested and when. It would have been an explosive story with massive audience appeal, and although it was very much in the public interest there were two reasons he couldn't use it. In the first place, it was not a visual story; in the second place, "the timing was bad because of licensing problems that the channel was having". (G. Mazarakis, 2008) He also always has to consider whether or not there will be legal action brought against the program, as the electronic media is far more susceptible to litigation than print. He shared his information about Selebi with the print media instead of using it himself.

Diana Lucas reiterates the point. "The public interest is fine and we can push the boundaries until we do something that really worries them about the licence and stuff like that." (D. Lucas, 2008)

However, although there is an acknowledgement that audience ratings and advertising revenues ultimately rule, the producers in question are somewhat cushioned by the stations themselves. There was never any inclination that stories

are specifically manufactured to please business interests, or that the programs keep that sort of information top of mind in deciding which stories to produce.

Most of the focus groups were very aware of how important the market is to journalism, understanding the business of the media far more than the principles of it. The upper LSM groups spoke knowingly about ratings and advertisers, and the lower male LSM group was also conscious of the need to sell the products. Only the lower LSM women seemed somewhat oblivious to this fact.

6.9 Disclosure of Payment

When payment is absolutely necessary, the public and journalists predominantly agree that the fact should be disclosed; that there should be transparency in methods used to obtain information. Only the lower LSM male group were opposed to the idea of transparency, feeling that either the public would not find out, or that being open about buying stories or videotape would encourage a market for stories.

Amongst the journalists Teri Leppan was the only hold out. "Paying for information requires extreme discretion on the part of the journalist that may not be understood by the viewer." (T. Leppan, 2008) Her concern was that it would undermine the veracity of the story. Many producers initially had reservations but finally agreed that if methods were transparent, and with the fact of payment revealed, there would be a "much more informed public conversation". (R. Landman, 2008)

> "It's actually a bit hypocritical of us as a community of journalists to say that what everyone else is doing should be in the public interest, but surely our work is absolutely in the public interest and therefore the public should know everything about how it comes into being. And if there is something in that process that we want to hide from the public, what does that say about our ethics?" (R. Landman, 2008)

Landman has a good point. The contract a professional journalist has with the public should be as sacrosanct and transparent as a doctor/patient relationship.

In considering the above, it is interesting to reflect back on journalism's guiding principles regarding truth telling, in which journalists should "avoid surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional methods will not result in acquiring information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story." (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996) Once again, it is only stories that are in the public interest that would so qualify.

There is also the argument that should the fact of payment be later uncovered by the public, it could potentially damage the credibility of the program irreparably.

6.10 Differences between Audience and Journalists' views

There were a few issues about which audiences and journalists agreed. As previously mentioned they concurred about transparency. There was also an understanding that if a product did not sell, it would not remain in the marketplace. Both audiences and journalists accepted that paying for passage in third world countries and conflict zones did not, in any material way, affect the quality or ethics of journalism. Beyond that there were only points of departure.

While journalists believe that they are ethical and give great thought to decisions of morality, audience perception is vastly different. It was apparent during focus groups that the viewing public had no idea how seriously journalists took their profession. Ideas such as integrity, responsibility, social contract were never mentioned. In their place were words like bias, lazy, sensational.

Journalists appear to have lofty ideals about their profession and the ethics thereof, whereas the viewing public is largely unaware of the issues, the reasons for such issues, or the normal functioning of the profession. They did not appear to be aware of competition between the programs, many did not distinguish quality, and almost all admitted to never having entertained the concepts discussed in the focus groups.

They either had not given any thought to the matter, or had prejudged the situation, believing that many journalists do pay for stories.

6.11 Reciprocity and Professionalism

However, media academic Robert Boynton (2008) suggests that there are times in which it may be appropriate for journalists to pay their subjects. The specific example he uses is when a journalist has financially profited, from writing a book for example, and repeated appointments with the subject have been necessary.

This is exactly the situation Debora Patta experienced. Michaela Hunter was abducted from a hospital as a newborn and Patta covered the story comprehensively as a radio journalist for 702. When the child was found almost two years later, she wrote a book about the Hunter family and their horrific experience. She divided the profits with them, and feels it was just. "We spent so much time with them. They often had to give up valuable time from work and after hours. I mean it was actually a physical onus on them to give us their time so I think it was very fair that they had a share of it." (D. Patta, 2008)

Even when there is no payment forthcoming, some feel that there is a reciprocity of sorts. "We don't give nothing." (R. Landman, personal communication, March 6, 2008) Ruda Landman is adamant that without paying one cent, a subject is nonetheless rewarded. "I don't think we can ever underestimate the value it has for people to have their lives validated by good and ethical attention being paid to them." Landman believes that interviewing people, producing stories about them is about a reciprocal arrangement within a social contract.

> "I've always felt that if you broadcast in the same cultural bubble that your subject lives in, then you don't have to pay because there it's part of social capital. General information about what our society is like is an incredibly important part of democracy and so forth and therefore a doctor giving his

> time to be the expert - in the first place he gets direct exposure as a professional person – but in the second place both of us are playing a role in this bigger machinery of this social contract." (R. Landman, 2008)

One only has to remember Michael Buerk's reporting of the Ethiopian famine for the BBC more than two decades ago to understand the extent of this social contract.

"Sometimes you're giving a bigger thing [than a donation]; you're giving them publicity because they get money from that. Sometimes giving the publicity is what they need." (D. Lucas, 2008)

However, as previously discussed, it is unlikely that a local South African program could affect much change outside its borders, and Landman spoke of the discomfort when shooting in other countries where subjects would never see the stories or benefit from them in any way.

"But here…before M-Net started, white people had no idea how their black neighbours lived. We told them that, and I think that was repayment enough for the time we spent there." (R. Landman, 2008)

This concept of a social contract harkens back to normative theories of the media; journalism at its most professional. It is what journalism in its purest form is meant to be – an exchange of views; a public sphere; informing society of uncomfortable truths; shaping perceptions to dismantle stereotypes. This is why journalists are so important; why journalism is crucial.

As far as paying "good and ethical attention" Landman put forward an example of when she felt she was engaging in the 'vulture-like' behaviour journalists are sometimes known for. A member of the *Carte Blanche* team had convinced Rob Matthews, father of kidnapped and murdered student Leigh Matthews, to speak to them. "I felt awful going into that house and talking to him, but I did not feel that he

shared my feeling, that he felt diminished or demeaned by it. On the contrary he felt that it was right that society was paying attention."

She feels that such an interview validates a crime victim; that what happened to him was also deemed unacceptable by society. The media and the public sat up and took notice. (R. Landman, 2008)

Debora Patta likewise raised the issue of the social responsibility a journalist must assume. "The only thing we have going for us is integrity. That's the only thing journalists have; that's our only currency. And the minute we lose that currency, we lose our ability to be good journalists, we lose our credibility." (D. Patta, 2008) Patta feels there is a respect that goes along with being a journalist, and when one engages in unethical behaviour, one risks the profession. "It's actually as big as that. So you do have a social contract with the public and there is a great onus on us journalists to act responsibly, particularly in the field of investigative journalism." (D. Patta, 2008)

Many journalists spoke about the value of experience and professionalism in dealing with ethical issues; the need for a knowledgeable and skilled executive producer or bureau chief to confer with. Experience, discussion and education appear to be the key factors to successfully negotiate one's way around these types of grey areas. While there was no unanimous view about whether ethics should be taught in an academic environment or exclusively in the workplace, no one felt that a junior journalist should be left alone to resolve such predicaments.

Many journalists believe they inherently know what is right or wrong. While some journalists may have such a developed sense, the whys and wherefores are equally, if not more important. Study of the subject provides one with specific tools by which to judge. Younger journalists schooled in the workplace may be taught

whether decisions are ethical or not, but possibly not why or how to make such judgments.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Perhaps South Africa has been protected by its distance or relative lack of competition, but the report has shown that the standard of journalism as practiced by executive producers on *Carte Blanche, 3rd Degree,* and *Special Assignment* is high; higher than the press code stipulates and certainly much higher than the audience perceives it to be.

It would appear that journalism is in dire need of good public relations. Most viewers interviewed spoke about the media with distrust. There is a general cynicism about the industry in the upper LSM groups who are the major consumers of media, although no group spoke glowingly about the profession. Each one had criticisms about sensationalism and inaccuracies, about prejudice and lack of professionalism. The people who seemed most appreciative of it were from neighbouring countries, or those who have loved ones in rural areas. They felt it connected them to what was happening at home.

7.2 Audiences

There was a sense in some of the groups that journalism simply happens in its imperfect form, and there was no real understanding of the countless decisions that need to take place; or that there is a conscious process in journalism.

It would appear that most of the audiences interviewed perceive journalism as a business and information as a commodity. There was not always a sense that they were aware of what is necessary in producing good journalism.

In some ways it is understandable as people are often ignorant of occupations other than their own. However, journalism is a profession that affects everyone, in which the public is the client. There should be a greater understanding of its workings.

From responses in the focus groups, it would appear that the entire profession is thrown into disrepute when one facet of the media behaves unethically. Within the lower LSMs there is no apparent distinction between tabloid and quality journalism, and few seemed aware of individual journalists.

7.3 Journalists

All the journalists interviewed have provided insight into the practice of their profession, and their particular programs. One must bear in mind that there is always the possibility that everyone was not completely candid in the interviews. Executive producers specifically may want to represent their programs in the best possible light. However, there did not appear to be much for which to fault them.

Following extensive interviews, it has been found that decisions regarding payment of stories and various issues surrounding chequebook journalism at the three South African television current affairs programs in question are not taken lightly. All executive producers have said that they do not buy stories. Decisions about the purchase of material goods are given careful consideration. Although each program has a specific culture, all of them put much thought into ethical decisions. The classical theories of meta-ethics are observed, as well as the press codes upon which they were conceived, even if journalists are oblivious to them. These South African journalists subscribe to a socially responsible principle of the press.

7.3 Original Questions

This report has found that issues regarding money and journalism are carefully considered by executive producers of *Carte Blanche, Special Assignment* and *3rd*

Degree, as well as by the producers working on stories for these programs. While it appears there are one or two areas in which the system as currently practiced has the potential to affect integrity, it is not done consciously and with any ulterior motive. When judgments must be made on issues concerning money, they are done so with much thought and discussion. It would appear that journalists perceive the public interest as the only excuse for veering from the highest standards of journalism. The biggest fault is a lack of transparency.

The reality of journalism as practiced in the television current affairs programs under discussion is definitely not in line with audience views. If they are to be aligned, one of two approaches must transpire: Either journalists must get off their ethical high horses and practice their profession as audiences believe they do, or they must reflect back to their responsibility to be accountable, encourage dialogue about methods used and educate the public about the process of journalism.

Media companies and production houses may need to openly declare their intention to deliver transparent, quality journalism; to be held answerable to the client - the public.

However, as flawed as journalism is, there was nonetheless a sense that it is important, and is increasingly functioning in areas that the police and government have failed to deliver on.

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APPENDIX 1

A1: Focus Group Questions

In the main, the line of questioning went as follows:

How many people read newspapers? Which ones?

How many people watch TV news and actuality? Which programs?

Does anyone have any experience with journalism/journalists? Do you think they are ethical people? How do you suppose they get information for their stories?

Outline of the following situation: After Leigh Matthews was kidnapped and murdered Donovan Moodley was arrested for the crime and was awaiting trial. His cell mate was a man named Johnny du Preez, to whom he allegedly confessed his crimes. YOU magazine interviewed Johnny du Preez, who told them about Donovan Moodley's alleged confession to him, and it was published in YOU magazine. Do you think it was right for YOU magazine to do that? EXPLORE REASONS

What if I told you that *YOU* magazine had broken the law in publishing that story? EXPLORE

What if I told you that *YOU* magazine had also paid Johnny du Preez for the story – how do you feel about that? Was it right? Why/why not? Do you think they would have got the same story if they hadn't paid for it? Why/why not?

YOU magazine said they felt they had to publish it because it was in the public interest. Do you agree? EXPLORE

Now let me outline another situation: A few years ago, *Special Assignment* was approached by a lawyer who was working on behalf of a few prisoners inside Grootvlei Prison. They had smuggled in a video camera and had taken footage of what was going on inside the prison. It was explosive footage – with wardens selling drugs, arms, bringing in juveniles for sex. *Special Assignment* decided they would broadcast it. Do you think their decision was right? EXPLORE – REASONS

What if I told you that *Special Assignment* had broken the law in broadcasting that story? EXPLORE

What if I told you that *Special Assignment* had also paid for the story, by way of paying the prisoners for the videotape? Does that change the way you feel? EXPLORE

Special Assignment justified what they did because they believed it was overwhelmingly in the public interest. Do you agree? EXPLORE

How is it different or not to what *YOU* magazine did? Is buying videotape different from buying an interview? TRY TO SEE IF THEY DISTINGUISH BETWEEN QUALITY OF JOURNALISM/ EXPLORE PUBLIC INTEREST

Should the public be told when footage or a story is paid for? Why/why not?

Do you feel the same way about *Special Assignment*/*YOU* magazine knowing what I've told you?

Does it matter which program does it? Do you trust one more than the other?

IF TIME - EXPLORE CONCEPT OF HAVING TO PAY FOR CERTAIN ITEMS IN THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES/CONFLICT ZONES

It would have been more relevant to contrast the purchase of the *Carte Blanche* interviews versus the acquisition of the *Special Assignment* videotape, rather than *YOU* magazine. However, that information was not known at the time of conducting the focus groups.

APPENDIX 2

Focus Groups

There were four focus groups conducted, divided into gender, and upper and lower Living Standards Measure (LSM).

A2.1 Female LSM 6-7

There were 7 women who took part in the focus group. They were:

Elsie - merchandising

Teoni- information clerk

Nadine – ordering clerk

Hazel – tea lady

Annetjie – cleaner, training as a horticultural advisor. Annetjie spoke and understood only Afrikaans and did not take part in the discussion.

Eliza – horticultural advisor

Ivy – sales consultant

Everyone, generally, reads newspapers or magazines. Only a few of them watch television, and those who do mention *3rd Degree* more than any other program.

Two women think the media has a tendency to sensationalise things. “They blow it up out of all proportion totally... we want the truth and only the truth.”(Teoni) The others were more complimentary, saying that because of the media they are aware of what is happening in Zimbabwe and in rural areas.

The *YOU* magazine/Donovan Moodley situation was outlined. The objections were that both sides of the story had not been published. When it was pointed out that *YOU* had broken the sub judice law in publishing, they were asked for their opinions again. Only a few responded

but all who did felt it was wrong because there was a court case pending. When the fact of payment for the information was disclosed, it prompted more response. "They were supposed to pay to get that interview. I think that's right because they need that information." (Ivy). "They must pay. Because they need to know." (Eliza) "They must pay." (Annetjie) However Hazel had a different take completely. "I think there's no need to pay somebody to give that information if that thing is true, somebody has to just say without being paid because if he did, if they paid, then he can lie because he wanted the money." (Hazel). Nadine pointed out that it was becoming like America, and that paying for it "definitely" affects the truthfulness of the interview. "It makes me feel quite sick" (Teoni). Teoni felt that people with information of the sort that Johnny du Preez had should want to come forward, and not wait to be paid. The tone was set from that point on with three women vociferously against the idea of payment, and the other four very much in favour.

However all were in agreement that *YOU* magazine should have told the readers that the interview had been paid for. "Yeah, and they need to tell us the reason why they paid for that information." (Hazel)

The *Special Assignment* situation was described, with the purchase of the Grootvlei prison tapes. It was explained that the law was broken in paying prisoners for the tapes. Nadine, Teoni and Hazel felt it was correct that *Special Assignment* had paid. "I think it helps the government to see that the crimes go on and on in South Africa and if those cameras were not there, I think they would say, those prisoners are safe where they are, South Africa is fine." (Hazel)

Nadine, Teoni and Hazel all felt the two cases were very different, and were of the opinion that screening the prisons tape was in the public interest. Ivy, Eliza and Annetjie were then persuaded.

Most felt that it would have made no difference to the content of the tape if *Special Assignment* had pledged money to the prisoners before the tapes had been made. Nadine

disagreed. "They're getting their money in prison to do what they're doing, so they're actually adding fuel to the fire." (Nadine)

They all believed that *Special Assignment* should have made the viewers aware that the videotape had been purchased. The program had not lost any credibility in their eyes.

They were asked if they thought it made any difference that in one case a story was bought, and in the other case it was videotape that was purchased. Nadine felt that videotape is documentary evidence, whereas a story can be fabricated. "On videotape you can see what the truth is, it's evidence." (Nadine). Hazel agreed with her. "I think it's better if you're talking about something you have seen with your eyes than just reading in the newspaper." Ivy and Annetjie agreed, and while Teoni felt that the purchase of both was wrong, she said that buying the *Special Assignment* tape was justified. However Elsie and Eliza took a very different stand. Their point was that documented evidence exists for all to see, but stories that go unrewarded may never be expressed. "It's better to pay someone to tell you their story ... because if you don't pay where are you going to find that information?" (Eliza)

All of them claimed to trust TV more than newspapers, and were asked which programs they specifically trusted. *3rd Degree* came up, "I trust Debora" another added. When asked about *Carte Blanche* and *Special Assignment*, the response was "they're pretty much like *3rd Degree*." (Nadine)

They were asked if they would have any problem generally with journalists having to pay money at times to do their jobs as journalists in Africa. In what appeared to be a contradiction, Ivy said, "I don't think it's OK. If you need the information sometimes you need the information, not to pay somebody for it. You can, maybe at the end, you can pay that somebody as a reward after you get that information." Ivy believed that money should change hands for information, not just because it's expected for no particular purpose.

A2.2 Male 6-7 LSM

The male 6-7 LSM group started slowly but became quite animated and interested. They were well read and generally had watched two of the three programs under discussion.

There were seven men who took part in the focus group. They were:

Clinton – receiving clerk

Garth – supervisor Mica floor

Person – sales consultant

Kenneth – sales consultant

Golden – sales consultant

Timon – data capturing

Michael – stock control

All read newspapers. Most watch *Special Assignment* and *3rd Degree*. Only Michael watches *Carte Blanche* regularly.

When asked if they thought journalists were ethical about half said yes, while others complained about inaccuracies. "We hear some of the celebrities if you read the *Sowetan*, *Sunday World* and then they're talking about their private life and then sometimes they say no, it's not true, so we don't really believe those articles in the newspapers." (Kenneth). "You never know if it's true or not because when they say something wrong and they put it on the front page, and then when we find out it's not true then they put a little thing on the back page in the corner." (Timon) Garth felt that the problem came when they wrote up their stories "then they also have to add flavour to the story and they spice it up. That's where the problem comes in, when they spice it up." (Garth)

The *YOU* magazine situation was outlined. They were asked for their response. Michael pointed out that everyone was entitled to a fair trial, and he wondered about the motives of Johnny du Preez. Timon, Golden, Person and Kenneth all felt that *YOU* was correct, that their job was to get close to what is going on and reveal the secrets, and that the police wanted to close the case quicker through Johnny du Preez. Knowing that the law had been broken was not a problem. "Making public, I think it helps even the magistrate or those involved in that case." (Timon) Person felt that only the journalists got the full story, that the police had not done their jobs properly. Garth felt that there was a chance that Moodley would be tarnished for life if innocent, but that journalists' jobs were to sell newspapers. Clinton surmised that du Preez must have been paid "because he can't tell them or expose it's a crime unless they paid him." (Clinton).

The rest of the conversation about the du Preez interview revolved around Michael and Garth pointing out that paying someone may induce them to lie, while Clinton, Golden, Person, Kenneth and Timon held strongly to the belief that one needs to pay to get information, and that by paying one gets the truth. "...you have to pay him, he's suffering, that's why you pay him. If you don't, he give nothing." (Timon) Person felt it was wrong, thinking that Moodley had already been found guilty, but changed his tune upon hearing otherwise. "He wasn't found guilty? No, it was fine then that they paid him just to get the story and to bring business elsewhere and the journalists have money and for the interest of the public." (Person) "Even me, I feel I'm guilty, but I don't have money I'm going to be arrested so I will talk everything... if before he was lying now he will come with the truth." (Clinton). "If you promise me something then I can give 100%". (Kenneth). "Journalists they are convincing people to tell them the truth and this is the way – money." (Clinton)

When asked if they were not concerned that information would be withheld in the hopes of a second payment, the response was one of indignation. "You cannot pay someone fully and get a half story." (Timon)

Michael and Garth valiantly fought back: "If you don't get paid, you just say A and B. Now you're being paid, you'd say A to Z. You won't make a whole long story out of it [if you're not paid]." (Garth)

When asked if they thought journalists usually pay, Garth felt that it was only in exceptional circumstances. Timon felt that "you cannot go around and buy something that is not worth it," while Golden said that "if the story is more sensitive, I would buy and if the story is not sensitive, I can't buy it." (Golden) Person seemed to do an about-turn. "I wouldn't say journalists would do the right thing to buy stories because journalists might buy lies ... when money's involved I can create my story just to get the bucks." (Person)

Knowing that *YOU* magazine paid for stories, they were asked if that made the magazine more or less believable to them. Two of the participants felt it affected their credibility.

In direct contrast to all the other focus groups, this one unanimously said that it should NOT be revealed that the story was bought. "They should just keep quiet." (Garth) He also felt that if they were open about it, "everyone's thinking OK, they'll get paid the next week".

They were told of the situation regarding the Grootvlei prison tapes, and all felt that it was believable because the camera had documented events. When told that it was illegal and that money had changed hands, Clinton seemed vindicated. "So with money we get the story fully." "When money's involved, you'll always be true." (Person) Everyone seemed satisfied that *Special Assignment* had taken correct steps. "That was definitely right that they did that. So what's the use – you go to prison and get locked up and you still have criminals. It's like they're not even locked up." (Garth) "I think the law works only if the public knows, that way it can work 100%. If the public knows then the law works. They must understand." (Timon)

Nobody thought less of *Special Assignment*. If anything, the credibility of the program was enhanced. Garth felt that they had paid for services rendered, while Michael seemed comfortable that what they had paid for was documentary evidence. "It was footage, it wasn't a story told from one person to another."(Michael) He did feel that paying for videotape should

only be reserved for big stories. Most of the group felt that there was no difference between *YOU* buying the interview and *Special Assignment* buying the tape.

When questioned about paying in Africa, Garth asked where the money comes from; that if it came out of pocket it might incentivise the journalist. Michael had no problem with what needs to happen when shooting in Africa and the other men regaled with stories about why it is necessary to pay. "You cannot just come to me and ask me to take you to Mike for nothing ... You have to give me something ... I want money, Mike also want money." (Timon) "You have to look at this thing, it's you who's benefitting and me I also have to benefit. Everybody, all of us, so you have to pay me." (Golden) "You also ask me for directions – in my hometown you ask where is the nearest supermarket ... HE RUBS HIS FINGERS TOGETHER. (Person) "If you want to get hold of Mugabe then I think it's a very difficult job because somehow you have to use money to get someone close to him, then you can find the truth." Kenneth)

A2.3 Female 9-10 LSM

The male and female 9-10 LSM groups were conducted in a home in Johannesburg.

There were 5 women who actually took part in the focus group. One woman, Kaysaree, was sick on the day, and e-mailed her answers in later. They have been included as if she had attended the group. The women were:

Wendy – language editor

Mandisa – consultant, small and micro enterprise development

Jackie – assists in husband's medical practice

Mary – consultant in medical aid industry

Sandy – recently sold a security company

Kaysaree – holistic consultant

Everyone consumed news and current affairs through print and television. Many mentioned watching *Carte Blanche*.

When asked how journalists gathered news, no one mentioned paying for it, though this was brought up later in the discussion.

They were asked if they thought journalists were ethical. One thought journalists are biased; another said that they are "more lazy than anything else. (Kaysaree) There was some consensus that journalists didn't let ethics get in the way of trying to find a story that would sell. While some thought this was in itself unethical, others felt that if they were tracking down a story that was important - in the public interest - it was right that journalists should be tenacious, because "we have the right to know what is going on [behind] closed doors in the government." (Jackie).

The *YOU* magazine scenario was presented to them and they were told that Moodley was awaiting trial. One women felt that if nobody else had the story, "then I say, well, go for it." (Mary). There was some suspicion about the veracity of the story, about du Preez's motives in telling it, and agreement that if *YOU* had not published it, he would have taken it elsewhere, and that there was a commercial interest in *YOU* publishing it. "The bottom line is to sell ... and they all enter into dubious practices to a certain extent throughout, I'm sure." (Wendy) Only Sandy mentioned the fact that he was awaiting trial and it would affect his chances of a fair trial.

A couple of the others were concerned about the veracity of the story upon learning about the payment, and didn't think that the public interest was served. "Why is it in the public interest? The man is going to face trial, he is going to go through due process anyway. Theoretically the truth will be revealed in court, why is it in the public interest what his cell mate said?" (Sandy)

Mandisa did feel that it was in the public interest, that *YOU* should have gone to any length to get such a story.

> "It was something that was very very very rare, that the crime was also getting into the Indian community. So I think that it was for me, personally, in the public interest to understand because you always have these two sides, with the white

> ones and the African ones and then now to say 'how does this happen?'"

Mandisa also felt that many stories in the tabloids are paid for, but that due diligence is done to ascertain the veracity of the story. Not everyone agreed. "I do agree that the story is important, the public has a right to know the truth, but at what cost? Not at the cost of selling more *YOU* magazines!" (Kaysaree) Most of the group felt that it was an important consideration to know the process of how the story came to be – whether *YOU* magazine approached him, or he called them with the story. Sandy felt that either way, it was just as likely to be fabricated.

When asked if the public should have been told that the story was paid for, all agreed that this should have been revealed, but there was one slightly different take.

> "If they told the people, the readers, would probably not have believed the story but we all know that these stories, they pay for them. Even the newspapers, if you've got to sell your story, they pay, they pay for the story. But that's why I'm talking more about the authenticity. For me it's the authenticity of the story." (Mandisa)

Sandy spoke about Maverick magazine, about seeing posters of the covers with high powered business people looking down from street corners. She had assumed that companies paid the magazine to write glowing reports about their CEOs and she had avoided the magazine as a result. Upon reading it one day she was pleasantly surprised to find that it was interesting and well written, and not at all what she expected.

The issue of paying consultants was brought up spontaneously.

> "If somebody's interviewing Mary on her job...they're taking her time. If you're a consultant ... you are going to bill for your time... so what makes it different from a journalist interviewing somebody else to gather information and that journalist not paying?...It's not even a case of bribing – it's paying them for their time and I feel [they] deserve that money as much as a journalist deserves the time that she's giving to them." (Jackie)

They were also fairly certain that magazines, even newspapers, paid for stories. "I don't think it's necessarily always a hard cash deal...I mean if somebody's interviewed about their business

it's damned good publicity for their business, so there's a financial understanding though it's not a payment." (Wendy) "I think it's common knowledge that most magazines do pay for their stories." (Jackie) Everyone agreed, "no one's going to venture any information, in a lot of cases, for nothing." (Wendy) There was some suspicion that journalists bribe to get documents. While they said that they did expect it with certain magazines, they would feel differently about the quality press if it was discovered that they also paid.

When questioned as to whether television is tarred with the same brush as print, they didn't think so. "I think current affairs is different because it's far more about public interest." (Mary) "Somehow I don't think that the TV pays for exposing or investigation." (Jackie) Mandisa didn't agree. "My perception is, for the good story, they will go to all lengths, they will pay." (Mandisa)

Mandisa was also the lone voice in this group in saying that if she had information she would

> "not give it out for free...The journalist would make sure that there is something that is going to attract me or there's something that's going to make me divulge information to him. ... You go back to apartheid days, where it was difficult to talk to say the truth. And it was difficult to give out these photographs, etc. etc. My perception is that there must have been an exchange of money."

She spoke frequently about the authenticity of the information being the most salient point, not whether or not it had been paid for. However, for good information there must be an exchange of money. "We cannot be choosy about how we bring the news. If we have to get the news, we have to get the news and bring it to the public."

She went on to explain that if a story is an important one that really affects the public, it was acceptable to pay for it. Both Mary and Kaysaree felt the same, but Kaysaree added that "hardworking journalists may not need to pay anybody if they are prepared to do the leg work and the necessary running around and snooping around that becomes necessary in this kind of reporting." (Kaysaree)

Sandy believed that paying the source of a story affects the credibility, and while she and Jackie claimed to be absolutist about the issue, both allowed that it was difficult to draw such a line at times; that sometimes the end justified the means. Sandy decided that when it is done in pursuit of a crime or a law that has been broken, then it is justified.

Wendy pointed out that in the case of *Carte Blanche* they probably didn't have to pay at all; that the weight of the program supersedes the need to pay and that everyone would do their best to avoid being seen in a negative light on *Carte Blanche*.

When the *Special Assignment* scenario was outlined to them, most generally felt what the producers did was fine, but "I think I would have felt a lot more comfortable if they had revealed that they had paid in the pre-amble before the story....it may have been more honest and honourable." (Sandy). Others agreed while Kaysaree felt that what *Special Assignment* had done was completely unethical and lawless. She was not present during the discussions, however. Her views were never tempered by the give and take of the group.

They also felt that motive and intent played a part in the Grootvlei prison tapes, both for the prisoners and for *Special Assignment*. As far as paying the prisoners for making the tapes, "you even have to pay for your wedding video to be shot." (Jackie) A couple other women also saw it as a service rendered, but several felt that there were no shades in buying a story and buying a videotape; that they were exactly the same thing. "TV documentary evidence can be as contrived as any kind of print can be; who's to know whether that's authentic or not or hasn't been edited to suit the story completely." (Wendy)

Two of the participants thought that the information presented rendered *Special Assignment* a less credible program. Others wanted more information about the process, then agreed that it had to be done in the public interest.

They were questioned as to which of the three current affairs programs had more credibility in their eyes. Everyone who responded mentioned *Carte Blanche* and its presenters, that there was a trust, a relationship and an accountability because of them.

When questioned about the extra expenses of shooting in Africa, those who responded felt it was not a problem. “It doesn’t affect the validity of the story and it doesn’t necessarily in any way affect the bias of the journalist.” (Sandy)

A2.4 Male 9-10 LSM

There were six men who took part in the focus group. They were:

Gary – sales

Greg – sport director

Gareth – teacher and student

Yannis – pathologist

Donald – restaurateur

John – actuary

Everyone reads newspapers. They all watch television, consuming news from local and overseas channels, the three current affairs programs and the internet.

When asked if they thought journalists were ethical there was no clear cut answer. “They are a cross section of human beings like anyone else.” (John) Mention was made of the Sunday Times firing Dave Bullard, and SABC’s lack of credibility.

The *YOU* magazine scenario was outlined. Immediately there were caustic comments about the calibre of the publication, “*YOU* magazine seems to appeal to the lowest common denominator. They just want to sell their magazine so they would go for a story that is sensational,” (Donald) and “(W)hat the hell are they doing interviewing a cell mate? He’s in jail!” (Donald). There were comments about promoting pre-trial bias but that journalism is a business and if they didn’t do it someone else would have.

No one was surprised that there was a payment involved, as everyone expected that *YOU* regularly did and some thought many other magazines buy stories as well. “A journalist’s job is to sell newspapers so obviously they [*YOU* magazine] would publish it [Moodley’s confession] if there is a benefit from that.” (Garth)

There was some resignation that in an ideal world one shouldn’t have to but that many stories wouldn’t be attainable otherwise. However, two of the participants felt that there should be a disclaimer, or even a law to say that you have to disclose the fact that you paid someone.

Most people thought that television pays as well, directly or indirectly. An example was given of a visiting celebrity being profiled on *Carte Blanche* “and it’s basically a promo for that individual, it’s a form of payment if you like.” (John)

Some felt that paying for stories was an acceptable way of newsgathering in certain circumstances, but not everyone did. “I think you’re introducing a bias into the information that you’ll get on the basis of the reward that you’re going to give.” (Yannis) Yannis was the sole member of the higher male LSM group who resolutely stood his ground. “If you stand on that slippery slope you’ll always find reasons why you pay ... this begins to snowball and becomes an established practice ... then an established norm.”

He carried on to speak about medical journals in which research findings are published. “The authors have to disclose ‘the authors were recipients of a grant from such and such company whose drug is being mentioned in the article’”. He carried the medical comparison further. “In the old days blood banks would pay people to give blood and they stopped that because they felt that people would give blood for reasons other than to help people.”(Yannis) “But the reality is... people are not going to do something for nothing.” (Gareth)

There was another mention of *Carte Blanche*, in which needy people are given exposure which encourages donors. It was deemed acceptable. (Gary)

Discussion came back to the fact that *YOU* magazine is a business and they do what they do to gain circulation. When the *Special Assignment*/Grootvlei Prisons story was described, no one

was perturbed that they had broken the law and paid for the videotape. “We as taxpayers are paying money so these prisons can operate and to lock these people away who committed crimes...they’re getting the truth out there, so I don’t have a problem with it.” (Donald).

Special Assignment’s rationalisation of how they arrived at the payment amount (by calculating the length of the purchased tape times the rate per minute) was scoffed at. “They’re running a business. They pay what they think the story is worth. It’s a margin, a profit/loss situation.” (John).

There was also some consideration of the risk the prisoners took to get the tape, and that they should be compensated for it. One person compared it to the movie “*The Insider*” about Jeffrey Wigand, a former highly placed employee in the tobacco industry whose life was left in ruins after going public about the industry’s knowledge of the addictive qualities of cigarettes and the real dangers of smoking.

> “What was the real benefit for him and yes you can take the moral high ground and say from the moral point of view he was a winner. In today’s world let’s be real, what does that mean? So you have someone sacrificing themselves for what we understand is the truth and what are they getting out of it? Do I go to the trouble, or should I find somewhere else where there’s some meaningful benefit and 90% of the time, meaningful benefit is money.” (Gary)

The conversation turned to the topic of whistle blowers, how badly they are needed in this country and how they should be compensated for the enormous risk they take. Several group members felt that payment was vital to encourage people to step forward with knowledge about corruption, and South Africa’s particular need for whistle blowers.

Greg pointed out that one could get at the truth by protecting a source, but also considered that payment. However, he felt that decisions regarding whether or not to pay a source for information should not be left entirely up to journalists.

> “It’s too high and mighty to say that journalists believe that you shouldn’t be paying – the truth needs to come out somehow...put it out there, let the people decide if they want to read it...whether that person is being paid and they’re exaggerating the story and leaving parts of the truth out – I would rather parts of

> the truth come out so I can go discover for myself what the actual truth is from various media than not have any of that revealed." (Greg)

The reaction upon learning that *Special Assignment* had purchased videotape from prisoners that *Carte Blanche*, citing ethical reasons, had turned it down was to consider the market opportunities.

> "I'm quite interested that *Carte Blanche* never buys stories. I didn't know that, which tells me it's bad business practice. They should put that point out very strongly as often as they can, which is saying that other people do pay. That's really the only edge you have in the marketplace, is the moral edge. Then you know when you watch *Carte Blanche* you're never watching a bought story, just as we know when we read YOU magazine, we're almost always reading a bought story." (John)

It was felt that different rules apply to different types of journalism. "If I took over *YOU* magazine, I'd carry on paying and I'd carry on accepting that everyone knew I was paying and I don't think that's unethical. But if I took over the *Financial Times* and I suddenly started to pay for stories when I know perfectly well that my readers don't know that I pay for stories - that's unethical." (John)

> I think it's generally accepted that readers know that stories are paid for period ...if you look at *YOU* magazine – the people that are into sensationalism read about smutty crime and we know for a fact that the stories are paid for but then you read the *Mail & Guardian* and hey, there is something serious here, there's a sense of confidence when we read this - the accuracy, number one, and the of it. And are they paying for it? I'm sure they are." (Gary)

Gary also felt that journalists must have informers that they paid for information, and journalists would be rewarded for coming up with a front page, or big stories.

Gareth and Yannis both felt that videotape was a safer purchase than a story. They all said that geography would make a difference is discussing this kind of morality, but had no problem with paying for passage and safety. "You're not actually paying for the story – there's no direct link from the payment to the story, so the payment is not incentivising the story to come out, it's just enabling you to confirm the story." (Gareth)

Yannis worried that one begins to doubt the sincerity of anything one reads. Gary, more cynically, said he was always convinced that paying is the normal practice, and was surprised to hear that there is very little of it as per the research gathered for this report. One of the possible reasons suggested was the lack of competition. "You can afford to have an ethical debate about it in the current environment which sounds like a very sheltered environment but when the reality in the environment changes and it becomes more competitive the same peoples' ethics will shift or they'll have to leave the marketplace and that's a reality, isn't it." (John)